

**Problems of
Representation and
Representativeness in
Ngugi wa Thiong'o's
Fiction**

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Abstract

Using a nexus of discourse theory, the French Feminism of Hélène Cixous and the deconstructive Marxist Feminism of Gayatri Spivak, this work examines the production of the sign 'woman' in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's fiction. I locate Ngugi's semiotics of the feminine in the conflicting discursive formations of two historical junctures of Kenyan resistance to colonial rule (the female circumcision debate and the Mau Mau insurgency), in which 'woman' is mobilized as a metaphor for the Kenyan social matrix by Gikuyu nationalist/traditionalist discourses. Following Spivak, I find in female circumcision a metonym of the silencing of the subaltern woman as an agency in insurgency. Ngugi's silencing of the historical struggles of Kenyan women obtains in his association of the female characters (or 'mothers') with the land throughout his fiction. The women in Ngugi's narratives are thus located outside of an historical present, inasmuch as they represent either an idyllic past (prior to the colonial incursion) or an harmonious future utopia. Further, Ngugi's gender representations enable the political vision of his novels and contradict the socio-political convictions which he has elaborated outside of his fiction. By refusing to engage the vestiges of the Gikuyu patriarchy, Ngugi consolidates his privileged position within the Kenyan élite and proclaims to represent worker/peasant constituency transparently. Reading 'against the grain' of the later novels, I locate in the prostitute or 'fallen woman' a figure which unsettles the economy of gender difference constituted by Ngugi's patriarchal master-narrative, and which therefore disrupts Ngugi's androcentric historiography.

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Introduction

In a recent television programme aired by the South African Broadcasting Corporation on the daily lives of the Masai in Kenya, a pubescent girl awaits her entry into womanhood, which will commence after she has been clitoridectomized. She is a shy child and she laughs off the narrator/interviewer's questions regarding the imminent event, or answers in monosyllables. The preparations, the festivities and the responses of her immediate family to the occasion are all captured by the camera. On the day of the girl's clitoridectomy, the viewer is shown the celebratory dances, the slaughter of a goat and the operator's 'surgical' razorblade. At the moment of the incision, the camera is positioned some distance from the surgeon's hut. The girl screams twice. In the next take, the surgeon explains (via the interviewer/translator) that a second excision became necessary because the first did not remove all of the clitoral tissue. The camera then records the girl's activities a month later: immediately prior to her marriage. She no longer responds to the interviewer's questions. She is silent. Her father explains that he is a contented man, because his daughter's beauty will fetch a reasonable bride-price in livestock from the family of the future husband.

In World Press Photo 1996, six photographs record the circumcision of a sixteen year old adolescent, Seita Lengila (Stephanie Welsh, 1996: 29-31). Held down by her female relatives, her scream is reported visually, if at all. 'It' is silent. Another photo depicts Seita examining her (now-public) parts in the bush some way from her homestead; she is ascertaining what exactly has been done to her.

In Facing Mount Kenya, Kenyatta writes:

[Cold] water is thrown on the girl's sexual organ to make it numb and to arrest profuse bleeding as well as to shock the girl's nerves at the time, for she is not supposed to show any fear or make any audible sign of

emotion or even to blink...The [female elder] takes from her pocket (*mondo*) the operating Gikuyu razor (*rwengi*), and in quick movements, and with the dexterity of a Harley Street surgeon, proceeds to operate upon the girls. With a stroke she cuts off the tip of the clitoris (*rong'otho*) ...At this juncture the silence is broken and the crowd begins to sing joyously in these words..."Our children are brave...Did anyone cry? No one cried - hurrah!" (1968: 146)

I introduce my dissertation in this way for a number of reasons. There is a discrepancy between media representations and Kenyatta's representation of clitoridectomy. Kenyatta's account is framed by a nationalist political interest which consists in upholding the Gikuyu traditional patriarchy. The media representations, by omitting the voice of the clitoridectomized female subject, reconstruct an overarching Western morality which assigns the clitoridectomized Kenyan woman as its self-consolidating other. Kenyatta omits the possibility of the scream in the name of the Gikuyu subject's bravery and resolve during the experience of a *rite de passage* and the media does so by omitting to report the language with which the girl invests her scream. Does the scream signify pain, terror, fear, outrage? Does the scream signify anything at all?

The anti-colonial feminist critic occupies an uneasy, indeed compromised, position in relation to these archives. (S)he has no recourse to a dialogue with the clitoridectomized subaltern subject: Kenyatta's account implies that the subaltern woman is content with the custom of clitoral excision, and the media accounts 'mediate' any dialogue by filtering representations of the subaltern woman through opaque textual devices such as narration, translation, the interview, captions, camera angles, *inter alia* (amongst/between other things). The critic has no alias under which (s)he may speak with or for gendered, racial and class-oppressed alterities. How then does a Westernized 'white' South African male feminist critic begin to address the female representations of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's fiction, given that much of Ngugi's work is informed by the very patriarchal

discourses which are dissimulated by Kenyatta's anthropological treatise on the Gikuyu, and are dissimulated more perniciously by the Western media? How does this critic interrogate clitoridectomy and its cultural significance in the Gikuyu community, as well as its narrative import in Ngugi's historiography? The critic may not speak for the gendered subaltern subject, because the critic's own position as narrating subject would simply compound the subaltern's silence. Equally, the critic may not speak with the subaltern woman, because to do so would collapse the class hierarchies and subject formations which differentiate the subject-positions of 'critic' and 'indigene'.

My reading of Ngugi's novels seeks to interrogate his female representations by questioning his patriarchal assumptions, investigating the historical narrative produced by his female representations and finally, asking to what extent Ngugi's novels are representative of the Kenyan peasantry if they silence half of his peasant/worker constituency. In producing this reading, I am aware that I also work problematically within the crisis of representativeness which confronts the feminist critic who addresses the subaltern woman from a comparatively privileged location within an academic institution. In my view, a theoretical framework derived from the work of the feminist deconstructive Marxist critics Gayatri Spivak and Hélène Cixous offers a most productive (but not privileged) means of speaking to the Kenyan subaltern woman via Ngugi's narratives. Cixous and Spivak respectively offer a critical perspective which consists in 'writing (the) between' or 'reading against the grain' of patriarchal discourses.

In terms of this framework, I read Ngugi's novels in order to discover how his narratives develop patriarchal traditionalist and nationalist ideologies, and attempt to discover the itinerary of gender-silencing which frames Ngugi's historiography. In the later chapters of this work, I attempt to locate moments of disruption in Ngugi's texts which may offer a place from which

the subaltern woman (as an agency in insurgency) might begin to speak. Equally, the possibility of her speech would bring both Ngugi's narratives and my theoretical positioning into productive crisis. In my first chapter, I develop on Hélène Cixous' theoretical framework for the analysis and interrogation of patriarchy and articulate it within the international frame which the Marxist deconstructive feminism of Gayatri Spivak provides. In my third and fourth chapters, I investigate the historical silencing of Gikuyu women in two Kenyan traditionalist/nationalist insurgencies: the circumcision debate and *Mau Mau*. In my chapters on Ngugi's most recent novels, I focus on the subaltern prostitute as an agency in insurgency.

Two million girls are circumcized worldwide on an annual basis. One hundred million women worldwide bear the mark of lack which clitoral excision inscribes. There has been a substantial amount of criticism directed at deconstruction as a relativist theory, which levels all it engages and posits nothing in place of its work. In contradistinction with the opponents of deconstruction, I view a deconstructive feminism as offering the very means by which cultural relativism invoked as an excuse for patriarchal praxes (such as clitoridectomy) may be in(ter)dicted. If patriarchy is the Law of the dead Father, deconstructive feminism brings the Law to account before itself, by disinterring the mark of patriarchal repression from patriarchy's obfuscated origins. Following a deconstructive feminism, I write within, and against, Ngugi's narratives: weep not, child, but scream.

Chapter 1

Women, Culture and Signs in Ngugi's Novels

The ideologies¹ which construct Ngugi's Kenya are imbricated in the construction of female subjectivity in his novels. One might tentatively refer to a patriarchal perspective in the texts because the various discourses which find expression in the novels (those of Socialism, Christian Nationalism and Gikuyu traditionalism, *inter alia*) are subsumed under one master discourse which upholds male privilege. I contend that the texts produce 'woman' in order to facilitate the reciprocation of different political ideologies between male characters. Thus, the women in the novels are utilized primarily as enabling signifiers for a fundamentally patriarchal discourse.

Perhaps the most immediate issue confronting any interpretive analysis of postcolonial literature is that of the political positioning of the theoreticians whose work informs the enterprise. In particular, Ngugi has been at the forefront of dissent against the employment of Eurocentric crypto-imperialist assumptions (deriving from a Western centre) which are brought to bear on African literature and culture. This stance stems from a burgeoning movement away from Western cultural dominance in relation to the production of the African text, in order that a distinctly African literary form may develop; one which may voice the ideals and issues which emerge from (and are contested within) the contemporary African experience.

As a (Westernized) male feminist living in a recently democratic former colony, South Africa, I attempt to avoid the entanglement within the broader Imperialist project, which would be implicit within a Eurocentric reconstruction of Ngugi's fiction, by making use of the work of Hélène Cixous and Gayatri Spivak. I believe that both of these theorists offer productive ways of working in the 'between' of colonial and nationalist/traditionalist patriarchal discourses. Hélène Cixous

is a Feminist Marxist who emerges, in Sandra Gilbert's words, from '...a girlhood as a dispossessed female Algerian French Jew...' (Cixous and Clement, 1986: xvi). Cixous has, therefore, an experience of marginality and originates from an African geographical setting, so her theoretical assertions are unlikely to be compromised by axioms derived from a Western metaphysical centre. It is of equal importance to stress that African women have existed under the triple oppressions of class, racial and gender differentiation, and this situation would not appear to have been relieved by the substantial political and cultural independence achieved by their African male counterparts. Thus, Cixous' theoretical or interpretive perspective, which might be used productively to expose or address the inequality of the female African subject, need not accord with the political traditions which have been established by male African activists. Nevertheless, it is important to add a cursory note that, in some limited respects, Cixous' theoretical framework addresses the Gikuyu peasant woman inadequately.

Cixous' essay, *Sorties*, begins by enumerating a series of binary hierarchies upon which traditional notions of gender have been established (1986: 63-64). In these binarities, the privileged term (the simulacrum) refers to the attributes which order male subjectivity, while the repressed term (the referent) corresponds with the ordering of female subjectivity: activity/passivity, culture/nature, day/night, father/mother, head/heart, intelligible/palpable, logos/pathos, action/passion, and ultimately, superiority/inferiority:

Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law orders what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatale, dialectical). And all these pairs of oppositions are *couples*. (1986: 64)

Cixous argues that it is through the ordering of these hierarchies by logocentric thought that male privilege is maintained.

Logocentrism / Phallogentrism

Cixous' analysis of gender binarism owes much to the work of Derrida, who was the first theorist to use the term 'logocentrism'. Madun Sarup comments:

Derrida uses the term 'logocentric' as a substitute for metaphysics in order to foreground that which has determined metaphysical systems of thought: their dependence on a *logos*. Western philosophy assumes that there is an essence, or truth which acts as a foundation of our beliefs; hence there seems to be a disposition, a longing for a 'transcendental signifier' which would directly relate...to a secure stable 'transcendental signified' (i.e. a *logos*). Examples of such signs would include: Idea, Matter, the World Spirit, God, etc. Each of these concepts acts as the foundation of a system of thought and forms an axis around which all other signs circulate. (1993: 37)

Derrida himself has said:

Must I recall that from the first texts I have published, I have attempted to systematize a deconstructive critique precisely against the authority of meaning, as the transcendental signifier or as telos, in other words history determined in the last analysis as the history of meaning. (1981: 49)

Derrida's insights are particularly enabling for a feminist discourse. In psychoanalytic discourse - particularly in Freudian and Lacanian theory - the phallus is a transcendental signifier. Freud claims that the Oedipus complex is organized around the fear of castration and that the Electra complex is organized around penis envy. The phallus is construed as fundamental to the formation of both male and female subjectivity - the female sexual organs are attributed no theoretical significance and are therefore repressed. Cixous would argue that Freud's theory is a replication of patriarchy, inasmuch as meaning is constructed by a patriarchal metaphysics. It 'privileges the phallus as a symbol or source of power' and is therefore phallogentric (Jefferson and Robey, 1993: 211). If the binary oppositions which

have ordered logocentric thought (head/heart, form/matter etc.) are also the hierarchies which order masculine and feminine subjectivity, then this points to a collusion between logocentrism and phallogentrism in the oppression of women and the suppression of their voices. Thus, Cixous claims:

...the logocentric plan had always, inadmissibly, been to create a foundation for (to found and to fund) phallogentrism, to guarantee the masculine order a rationale equal to history itself. (1986: 65)

Woman is excluded from access to, and control of, this order because she is the 'repressed that ensures the system's functioning' (1986: 67). Cixous elaborates:

...everything throughout the centuries depends on the distinction between the Selfsame, the ownself (-what is mine, hence what is good) and that which limits it: so now what menaces my-own-good (good never being anything other to what is good-for-me) is the 'other'. What is the other? If it is truly the 'other', there is nothing to say; it cannot be theorized. The other escapes me. It is elsewhere, outside: absolutely other. It doesn't settle down. But in History, of course, what is called 'other' is an alterity that does settle down, that falls into the dialectical circle. It is the other in a hierarchically organized relationship in which the same is what rules, names, defines, and assigns 'its' other. (1986: 71)

This distinction on the part of the Selfsame is, ultimately, a mechanism (of exclusion) by which it exerts dominance and establishes an economy (implied in Cixous' play upon the word good/goods). Cixous suggests that this economy arises as a result of the fact that the same assigns (produces) its other. Her suggestion is, in this respect, similar to Elizabeth Cowie's argument that exogamy produces the category of 'woman' in traditional kinship structures (1990: 117-133).

'Woman' as Sign Within Patriarchy

Cowie relies upon - and departs from - Levi-Strauss's investigation of kinship systems. She summarizes his theory as

follows:

Kinship is a structure through which men and women are put into place, through the complex rules of familial affiliation and the implications of these for a group in terms of duties and rituals to be performed by each sex as a result of that placing - as father, son, husband, and brother/uncle, and as mother, daughter, sister/aunt. Kinship is also a system of communication, the production of meaning between the members of the system, a signifying system, in which women are produced as a sign, which is circulated in an identical way to words. (1990: 119)

It is precisely the complex kinship rules which constitute a given society, because without rules of exchange, incestuous sexual relations would take place in the biological family. Society only comes about as a result of exogamy. This leads Cowie to observe that 'the rules of kinship are the society' (1990: 120). Further, the kinship system is a signifying system (a system of communication) because the act of exchange presupposes a sender and a receiver of the object of exchange (the sign). However, Cowie finds one aspect of Levi-Strauss's theory untenable. This is the assertion that:

...women are not subordinate because of the fact of exchange but because of the modes of exchange instituted. In arguing the neutrality of exchange as a concept, Levi-Strauss overlooks the fact that while in his theory the principle of exchange itself does not define or 'value' the items of exchange, which must always be equivalents although different, the terms of items of exchange must already be constituted, in a hierarchy of value, in order to be available to a system of exchange. (1990: 121, emphasis in the original)

Cowie is here exposing the inconsistency of Levi-Strauss' theory, which holds that objects of exchange form part of a pre-existent hierarchy of value, according to which acts of exchange take place. Cowie's refusal of this aspect of structuralist anthropology permits her to opt for a more radical implication of that theory. Rather than positing that woman is somehow prior to kinship structures (and that her reproductive and sexual

functions are considered valuable and are appropriated by those structures), Cowie holds that woman is produced, as object of exchange, within the system of exchange:

[Levi-Strauss's) theory can be understood specifying the production of woman within a particular system - exchange - and that this system is a signifying system producing woman as both object of exchange - positioned in the structure as mother, wife etc. - and as sign within that signifying system. (1990: 124)

She goes on to state that in this signifying system, woman is not to be thought of as having an intrinsic meaning. The meaning of woman derives from the fact that it is she (and not man) who is exchanged. Cowie is careful to avoid linking her argument to a more orthodox feminism which might attempt to examine the concept of woman in a given society:

The sign woman is produced within a specific signifying system - kinship structures - and hence while the form or rather the *signifier* of the sign, (which in language would be the sounds making up the word) is the actual person, woman, the substance or meaning of the sign, its signified, is not the concept woman. One cannot speak of "a" sign - woman - without specifying the system in which it has signification - exchange. Signs are only meaningful within the system of signification in which they are produced, and not as discrete units. (1990: 125)

While Cowie acknowledges that both men and women are positioned in society by the rules of kinship, she insists that only women are produced as signs. This emphasis on exchange as part of a signification system has important implications for a theory which interrogates the gendering of male and female subjects in culture:

The fundamental problem with the conception of language as communication is that it tends to obscure the way in which language sets up the positions of "I" and "You" that are necessary for communication to take place at all. Communication involves more than just a message being transmitted from the speaker to the destinee... [it] involves not just the transfer of information to another, but the very constitution of

the speaking subject in relation to its other. (Coward and Ellis, 1977: 79-80)

For Cowie, exchange sets culture in place. More importantly, it stages the (marital) sexual relations which take place within culture.

What, then, is the relation between Cowie's and Cixous' theories? For example, Cixous does not deal with the value that accrues to woman in the act of exchange. Nevertheless, Cixous' theoretical terms do provide a means of reading exogamy. In the act of exchange woman acquires (a negative) value precisely because she is the signifier which enables men to enter into relations of reciprocity and to assume their positions within culture. Cixous might express this differently: if the Selfsame hierarchizes the binarity man/woman in the act of exchange (man is constituted as a subject in exchange whereas woman is constituted as an object/sign), the simulacrum ('man') derives its value from its referent ('woman'). Since the Selfsame's very existence is imbricated in the other it assigns to itself, it must ascribe a negative value to that other.

Thus, the economy of the Selfsame (the simulacrum) relies upon the repression of the 'other' to order itself:

There has to be some 'other' - no master without a slave, no economico-political power without exploitation, no dominant class without cattle under the yoke, no 'Frenchmen' without wogs, no Nazis without Jews, no property without exclusion - an exclusion which has limits and is part of the dialectic. (1986: 71)

Cixous posits a site where the relations of power and subjection need not be reproduced; where sexual, political and economic desire (suggested in the term *jouissance*²) may come to the fore:

Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is writing. (1986: 72)

It is important to stress that her conceit 'coming to writing' is primarily applicable to women's fictions, because Cixous directs her focus upon the ways in which women may evade the constraints of the patriarchal order. However, the usefulness of Cixous' insights as a theoretical framework is evident when they form part of an attempt to 'write between the lines' of Ngugi's fiction. Despite the overt political importance of Ngugi's fiction, it establishes itself upon covert gender disparities. To this extent, Cixous' work provides a means of investigating the blindnesses or shortcomings of the fiction.

Lacanian Desire in the Colonial Context?

Cixous' adaptation of the Lacanian model³ of desire is consistent with a large body of feminist theory which has appropriated his insights for its own political purposes. This model is of relevance to my reading of Weep Not, Child. The imposition of colonial domination in Kenya might easily be viewed as the imposition of an alien Symbolic upon the Kenyan population. This Symbolic (a conglomeration of new laws, land alienation, the institution of both class hierarchies and of English, a language foreign to colonized subjects) fragments the indigenes' established social and cultural relations and their original relation to the land. Therefore, the colonized's yearning to repossess the land in Weep Not, Child could be viewed as symptomatic of a desire for an Imaginary which has been superseded by colonization. The text may thus be viewed as containing a logic of desire which has economic, political and sexual dimensions. However, I see this (ostensibly revolutionary) desire as originating in - and reproducing - the patriarchal/imperialist desire which first created the colonial situation in Kenya:

All the great theorists of destiny or of human history have reproduced the most commonplace logic of desire, the one that keeps the movement towards the other staged in a patriarchal production, under Man's law. History, history of phallogentrism, history of appropriation: a single history. History of an identity:

that of man's becoming recognized by the other (son or woman [or colonizer or female indigene]), reminding him, as Hegel says, death is his master. (Cixous, 1986: 79)

Cixous asserts that desire originates from '...a mixture of difference and inequality', based on the assumption that '[it] is always a difference in forces which results in movement' (1986: 79). The male colonized has, historically, been subjected to this difference of forces, less equal than the colonizer and more equal than the female indigene.

French Feminism and the African (Con)Text

One of the problems which a French Feminist analysis encounters in an African literary text is that much French Feminist theory presumes a universal 'woman'. French Feminism tends to assume that gender binarities and libidinal formations are self-evident under any form of patriarchy. For theorists such as Cixous, woman confronts a (metaphoric) Law no matter where she lives and what her circumstances are. Any analysis which draws upon French Feminism (despite Cixous' origins in Algeria) runs the risk of eliding the culturally-specific organizational hierarchies which 'third world' women confront. Equally, the dual oppressions of race and class, under which the indigene - as sexed subject - exists, are too often glossed over by Eurofeminism. This omission has problematic political implications, which Spivak terms 'the inbuilt colonialism of First World feminism toward the Third' in *French Feminism in an International Frame* (1987: 153). Describing French Feminist theorists, she asserts:

In spite of their occasional interest in touching the other of the West, of metaphysics, of capitalism, their repeated question is obsessively self-centred: if we are not what official history and philosophy say we are, who then are we (not), how are we (not)? (1987: 137)

The strength of Spivak's charge is that French Feminism risks complicity with Imperialism when the theorist consolidates her

own institutional position within the West by producing an other for whom she may speak. However, Spivak does not altogether dismiss French Feminism. In fact, she finds in it a particularly useful symptomatic reading methodology, provided that the theory is contextualized within an international frame.

I will adopt Spivak's use of the term 'the subaltern' in order to locate my use of French Feminism within the international frame that Spivak provides, and to facilitate a dialogue between Cixous' theory and Spivak's unique Marxist Feminist Deconstructive praxis, so that a subaltern historiography may be brought to bear on Cixous' theories. In her ground-breaking article, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' in three distinct ways. Firstly, it may be used to describe the heterogenous group of subordinated or exploited subjects who are not part of the elite and who have not developed a class-consciousness. Secondly, it may be used to denote the peasant woman whose subjectivity is produced under the laws and knowledge-systems of both the colonizing power and the indigenous patriarchy. For Spivak, the subaltern as sexed subject is the subaltern *par excellence*, and she shifts the historical focus on the subaltern woman from an exercise which seeks, paternalistically, to retrieve her voice, to an enterprise which exposes the way in which her voice has been silenced. Robert Young summarizes:

The problem is not that the woman cannot speak as such, that no records of the subject-consciousness of women exist, but that she is assigned no position of enunciation: 'there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak' (CSS, 129). She is allowed no subject position, or rather...she is not allowed to speak: everyone else speaks for her, so that she is rewritten continuously as the object of patriarchy or of imperialism. She is a signifier, whose distinction is that she is shifted from one position to another without being acknowledged any content. (1993: 164, Young's pagination)

The fact that the subaltern's voice is never found in history evidences the fact that the West (and for that matter, the

indigenous elite) produces her as its self-consolidating other. In what way then does subaltern historiography differ from Imperialist or nationalist historical narratives? How can it begin to speak to, rather than for, the subaltern subject, without producing the colonized's subjectivity and continuing its subalternization? Robert Young points to a third usage of 'subaltern':

In invoking the subaltern Spivak is also influenced by the *Subaltern Studies* group, who employ the term for a history that seeks to describe the 'contribution made by the people on their own, that is, independently of the elite' - the dominant groups whether foreign or indigenous who have hitherto monopolized the historiography of Indian nationalism. Charting and retrieving that contribution means that the subaltern quickly becomes identified with the (colonial) subject who is an insurgent and agent of change. Such a definition means that a critic or historian who traces the activities of such agents can also be termed subaltern in relation to dominant forms of academic historiography. (1993: 160)

The efficacy of Spivak's position obtains in her refusal to posit an unproblematic subjectivity or agency in the subaltern or in the historian, and her insistence that the colonial encounter must always involve the production of heterogeneous subjectivities among the colonized and a play of surfaces under which those subjectivities are formed. While Spivak holds that the (sexed) subaltern's voice may not be retrieved from history (it has already been subsumed under the subaltern's production as a subject of colonial and traditional law), she does allow that part of subaltern historiography's project may consist in creating the space for alternative histories (or, in Foucault's terminology, 'counter-memories') which transgress the representations of the subaltern by both colonial and post-colonial literatures.

Chapter 2

A Topography of 'Woman' in *Weep Not, Child*

At its most general level, this chapter will take its cue from a statement made by Cixous in *Exchange* (with Catherine Clement):

Everything on the order of culture and cultural objects has a prohibition placed on it, which causes class positions in relation to culture. Likewise, woman is uneasy in relation to a certain sort of production - the production of signs... (1986: 145, ellipsis in the original)

Ngugi's novel constructs an economy of signs (which corresponds with the construction of a material economy in Kenya) in a society which is undergoing the transformation to independence. *Weep Not, Child* was written in 1962 and published in 1964, and this period corresponds with the period of transition (beginning with Kenyatta's release (1961) and ending with the declaration of the Republic (1964)) from colony to independent nation (detailed in Sicherman, 1990: 5, 6, 85-87).

Despite the fact that Ngugi's conversion to Marxism occurred after his first two novels had been published, there is evidence of class-analysis in both *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*, which in turn points to the fact that fictional texts mirror, to some extent, the social matrix in which they are produced, because they partake of the discourses which construct and contest that matrix. I do not contend that the first two novels might be labelled 'socialist realist', but that they indicate Ngugi's early predisposition towards the world-view that he would later adopt. Thus, the first two novels are revealing in relation to the later fictions. In Ime Ikkideh's foreword to *Homecoming*, Ngugi's espousal of Marxism (which began - under the influence of Prof. Arnold Kettle - during a stay at Leeds University) is mentioned. Ikkideh continues that '...Leeds provided an ideological framework for opinions he already vaguely held' (Ngugi, 1975: xiii)¹.

Ngugi's early fiction isolates certain types or figures in Kenyan society and the plots involve them in interpersonal dramas for which politics and economics form the stage. I will engage Weep Not, Child at the various points at which Ngugi constructs or synthesizes the female subject, in order to demonstrate that her subjectivity is imbricated in the social vision of the novel.

In Weep Not, Child, the most obvious thematic disparity which emerges in relation to women is that of the different values which are ascribed to the sexual conquests of the male and female characters. The barber relates his reminiscences of the Second World War to his incredulous customers:

"[In this war] we carried guns and we shot white men."

"White men?"

"Y-e-e-e-s. They are not the gods we had thought them to be. We even slept with their women."

"Ha! How are they-?"

"Not different. Not different. I like a good fleshy black body with sweat. But they are...you know...so thin...without flesh...nothing."

"But it was wonderful to...."

"Well! Before you started...you thought...it was eh - eh - wonderful. But after...it was nothing. And you had to pay some money." (9-10)

The white woman is, like the gun, an enabling signifier in the barber's narrative, in that she permits the colonized to transcend or transgress² the rigidly hierarchized society in colonial Kenya. Significantly, this act takes place, outside of the colonized space, in "Jerusalem", the central geographical locus of Western religion.

In the barber's narrative, Jerusalem's significance is linked to the Christian discourse in the novel: in Christian mythology, the Messiah was crucified there. However, the story re-inscribes christological discourse with an anti-colonial discourse: if white men are not 'gods', then ('their') women who accede to intercourse with black soldiers are not untouchable madonnas. Nevertheless, the anecdote instrumentalizes women's bodies in order to found a counter-discourse and produces 'woman' as a sign

which enables the reciprocation of dialogue between male oppressed and the colonial christological and racist discourses which have previously inscribed his subjectivity.

By contrast, Ngugi depicts the sexual relations between Italian prisoners-of-war and Kenyan women in less flattering terms:

The Italian prisoners who built the long tarmac road had left a name for themselves because some went about with black women and black women had white children. Only, the children by black mothers and Italian prisoners who were also white men were not 'white' in the usual way. They were ugly and some grew up to have small wounds all over the body and especially around the mouth so that flies followed them at all times and at all places. Some people said that this was a punishment. Black people should not sleep with white men who ruled them and treated them badly. (5-6)

The passage is explicit in its analysis of these sexual relations: the act offends against the natural (or naturalized?) divide between oppressor and oppressed³, resulting in a diseased progeny - the product of a meeting between representatives of conflicting political groupings. However, it is difficult to conceive of the Italian prisoners as oppressors. They are, like the black women, victims of the English oppressor. In addition, the construction of the prisoners, children and black women founds male Gikuyu prerogatives in Weep Not, Child.

The same counter-discourse which operates in the barber's anecdote is at work in this passage. The wounds and flies allude to the plagues of boils and flies which beset the Egyptian oppressors of the Israelites (Exodus 8:20-31 and 9:8-12), and they prefigure the myth of Kenyatta as the 'Black Moses'. As in the barber's narrative, the counter-colonial discourse takes women's bodies as its referent; their bodies become vectors which transmit (and translate) the racial 'impurity' of the Italian prisoners to their children. The situation of the wounds 'especially around the mouth' is revealing. On one level, the children may have become contaminated at the site of nurture (the breast) during suckling. Alternatively, they may have contracted

venereal disease.

The barber's tale is, in Abdulrazak Gurnah's words, 'a traveller's tale of daring and exotic knowledge' (1993: 144) indicative of the (active) speaker's empowerment via carnal knowing: whether that knowing originates in physiological intercourse with white prostitutes or in its symbolic substitute, the insemination of white flesh with bullets. By contrast, the description of the black woman is rendered as history by an omniscient narrator who has a panchronic perspective. This denies the (passive) 'spoken' any possibility of empowerment, but rather points to the ineradicable carnal guilt which arises out of her meeting with the oppressor. Her guilt finds its embodiment in the diseased progeny, which are an enduring symbol of the 'unnatural' intercourse between foreigner and black woman. In French Feminist terminology, the two passages construct a hierarchy of value which entails the suppression of the female subject's voice by an overtly phallocratic discourse:

All history is inseparable from economy in the limited sense of the word, that of a certain kind of savings...This economy, as a law of appropriation, is a phallogentric production. The opposition appropriate/inappropriate, proper/improper, clean/unclean, mine/not mine (the valorization of the selfsame), organizes the opposition identity/difference...The (unconscious?) stratagem and violence of the masculine economy consists in making sexual difference hierarchical by valorizing one of the terms of the relationship, by reaffirming what Freud calls *phallic primacy*. (Cixous, 1986: 80)

Gurnah points out the discrepancies between the representation of male and female sexuality in Weep Not, Child:

What the barber and his listeners comment on is that white women for all their grandness will still sleep with black men, a response which implies both self-contempt and deference, the triumph of a discourse of conquest. The black women having babies which are not "white" in the usual way', on the other hand, offends a deeper sense of what is moral and clean. Underlying it is the assumption that for women sex is equivalent to submission, which is itself the bedrock of

patriarchal authority. The 'white' oppressor is indistinct and undifferentiated in this case, different and same: Italian or English, prisoner or settler. And since it was 'the whites' who brought calamity on the people, for African women to submit to them is abject. (1993: 144)

Gurnah exposes the logical inconsistencies in the political vision of the novel. While his analysis is acute, it omits a number of observations. Firstly, the fact that the progeny of the black women are ugly implies an evaluative aesthetic on the part of the author. Secondly, the children are posited as symptoms of colonization. Colonization itself is depicted as an infectious phenomenon, whether it is at the level of physiology (as it is here) or at the level of economics:

One could tell by [Nyokabi's] small eyes full of life that she had once been beautiful. But time and *bad conditions* do not favour beauty. (3, emphasis added)

The bad conditions to which the novel refers are the economic hardship and deprivation under which the dispossessed peasantry of Kenya have suffered. However, the employment of such an evaluative aesthetic in relation to the children and Nyokabi is a tenuous enterprise, because the myth of physical beauty is another of the cornerstones of patriarchy, and serves to place an arbitrary, relative value on people in order that they may be evaluated as *things*. The myth of beauty (and corresponding ugliness) is thus deeply implicated in the construction of the patriarchal economy.

Although the construction of the female characters in the novel reflects contradictory impulses, it is significant that those characters share an affinity with another contested domain: that of the land⁴. In Weep Not, Child the land is a commodity around which the economic and social lives of the male characters centre. It is the measure of a man's wealth (and therefore, of his social status) and it is the means whereby he may afford his wives:

Any man who had land was considered rich. If a man had plenty of money, many motor cars, but no land, he could never be counted as rich. A man who went with tattered clothes but had at least an acre of red earth was better off than the man with money. Nganga could afford three wives, although he was younger than Ngotho. (20)

Ngotho describes how the aspirations of the Kenyan soldiers who fought in the First World War were thwarted by the colonizing power, which did not reward their military service with access to, and ownership of, the land. Significantly, his speech locates the land within the discourse of love:

We came home worn out but very ready for whatever the British might give us as a reward. But, more than this, we wanted to go back to the soil and court it to yield, to create, not to destroy. But Ng'o! The land was gone. (25)

The construction of Howlands, who operates in many respects as a double for Ngotho, echoes the parallel between possession of the land and sexual conquest:

For the farm was a woman whom he had wooed and conquered. He had to keep an eye on her lest she should be possessed by someone else. (127)

Boro's accusation against Howlands again implies this analogy, and his second sentence reveals Ngugi's gendering of the land:

Together, you killed many *sons of the land*. You raped our women. (128, my emphasis)

The narratorial voice (which, I will argue, is a conglomeration of the discourses which are immanent in the text) also contributes to the discursive construction of the land:

"This is my land." Mr Howlands said this as a man would say, This is my woman. (129)

Howlands has nothing to say in his defence (128-129). He has

neither learned from his experience, nor repented of his complicity in the history of colonization. Yet - despite their different ideological positions - Howlands, Boro and the narrator all reciprocate a patriarchal discourse, for which woman/the land are enabling signifiers. The *terminism* (the doctrine that individuals have limited time to learn from their mistakes and repent) implicit in the passage suggests the admission of the dual discourses of Christian religion and of education. These discourses are elsewhere contested by the discourse of liberation, particularly in the juxtaposition of the worldviews of figures such as Njoroge and Boro/Kamau⁵.

The trope of the 'raped' land is one which is developed early in the novel, where the description of the land locates itself within a discourse which links history with pathology:

You could tell the land of Black People because it was *red, rough and sickly*, while the land of the white settlers was green and was not *lacerated* into small strips. (7, my emphases)

Significantly, the surface of the land is infected or diseased in much the same manner as the children of the Italian prisoners-of-war, and this infection is attributed to the penetrative intrusion of the colonizer. Cook and Okenimpke add that this passage blends '...objective presentation with the terminology of political myth...' (1983: 60). I would suggest that the political myth to which these critics refer is that which naturalizes the link between the subaltern and the land.

The association of the female subject with the land points to the idealization of the land as a woman and the reification of woman as a palpable entity within culture. It also indicates that the primary injury or wounding effected by colonization is not political (a denial of rights and freedoms) or material (a denial of commodities or of control over production) but psychosexual (a denial of potency). The emphasis placed on male potency is consistent with a patriarchal construction of subjectivity. Thus,

once resistance is underway and the established colonial hierarchies are on the brink of inversion, it is significant that Howlands has 'discovered that black women could be a good relief' (128) from the political and sexual pressures of his situation; his wife has left for England during the emergency and, as District Officer, he is responsible for the eradication of Mau Mau. Since his position on the land is more precarious after the advent of Mau Mau, the most obvious respite available to him is with that entity which Ngugi allies most closely with the land - the subaltern woman⁶.

The association of the land and the subaltern (sexed) subject subsumes each under a patriarchal discourse: the subaltern woman is allied with 'nature' while her male counterparts dominate 'culture'. Thus, the subaltern woman is silenced in Ngugi's text, because she lacks political representation in it. In turn, this implies that the society in which the novel was produced is a patriarchy. I will deal with this issue more comprehensively in my second chapter, but a few preliminary remarks about Gikuyu culture - as it is posited in the novel - are relevant here. Firstly, the exchange of women is closely related to the possession and proprietorship of the land (20, *ibid.*) and this indicates that Gikuyu women are demarcated as property in Gikuyu tradition. Secondly, there is evidence of a rigid gender delineation in relation to the rôles of men and women among the Gikuyu. Kamau objects to the babysitting which his apprenticeship to Nganga entails:

'...And you know,' and here Kamau spoke in disgust, 'his youngest wife actually makes me hold her child just as if she was a European and I her Ayah...' (20)

It is also evident that 'manhood' in Gikuyu tradition entitles men access to women's bodies:

Njoroge always longed for the day when he would be a man, for then he would have the freedom to sit with big circumcised girls [*sic*] and touch them as he saw the young men do. (22)

If women are demarcated as the property of men in Gikuyu culture, these words suggest a contractual regulation of that property. Access to women's bodies may only be achieved by submitting to the rite of passage (circumcision) which the patriarchal tradition prescribes. Ngugi partakes of this tradition to the extent that his narrator adopts a traditionalist discourse - in terms of which the difference between 'big circumcised girls' (not 'women') and 'young men' reveals the very real material disparities between men and 'big girls' in traditional Gikuyu society. Circumcision in this novel (and in later novels) functions to legitimate a man's identity as man by bestowing privilege and status upon those who have undergone the ritual, and this privilege is a privilege over women. Boys come to presence as men over the silent bodies of women.

In *Feminism and Critical Theory*, Gayatri Spivak comments on gendered socioeconomic hierarchies:

The extended or corporate family is a socioeconomic (indeed, on occasion political) organization which makes sexual constitution irreducibly complicit with historical and political economy. To learn to read that way is to understand that the literature of the world, itself accessible only to a few, is not tied by the concrete universals to a network of archetypes - a theory that was entailed by the consolidation of a political excuse - but by a textuality of material-ideological-psycho-sexual production. (1987: 82)

Although Spivak is referring here to Feminist speculation that an extended family or community of women might cure the ills of the nuclear family, her words are applicable to the extended family in Weep Not, Child. The extended family in Gikuyu society is further extended by the introduction of age-sets after circumcision, in which material/ideological and psychosexual disparities between Gikuyu men and Gikuyu 'girls' are entrenched, in culture, as a natural state of affairs.

Perhaps the central concern of Weep Not, Child is that of the alienation of property from the Gikuyu by the colonizer. This

property is, primarily, the land, but the gendering of the land and the use of woman as a commodity suggest that woman herself is considered property by Gikuyu men. The subaltern woman is not only demarcated as physical property in the text, but she is also used as the discursive property of the author-function. Ngugi achieves this by producing a sign 'woman' which enables the reciprocity of political discourses (nationalist, martial or colonial) between the male characters. The production of female characters in political discourses is tantamount to denying the subaltern (sexed) subject a voice (or heterogenous voices) in the novel.

Where the novel alludes to a dissenting female voice, it is that of the termagant who proscribes or limits male freedom and activity:

If you said that you did not know who the barber was, or where his shop was, people at once knew you were either a stranger or a fool. A fool, in the town's vocabulary, meant a man who had a wife who would not let him leave her lap even for a second. (9)

The word 'lap' is symptomatic of the patriarchal discourse of the community. The word at once indicates and euphemizes (or disguises) what it is that the community stigmatizes in the figure of the termagant: it is her reproductive capacity and her desire, which elude the phallocratic 'Law'.

Similarly, the representations of motherhood in the novel serve the dominant phallocratic discourse by locating Nyokabi in an altruistic, passive (and therefore, apolitical) position:

It was to [Nyokabi] the greatest reward she would get from her motherhood if she one day found her son writing letters, doing arithmetic and speaking English...It did not matter if anyone died poor, provided he or she could one day say. "Look, I've a son as good and as well-educated as any you can find in the land."

You did not need to be educated to know this. Her mother's instinct that yearned for something broader than that which could be had from her social

circumstances and conditions saw this. (16)

It is not difficult to detect an autographic⁷ subtext in this passage; in which Ngugi collapses his own class-position within the educated élite and attempts to render transparent the relationship between the peasantry and the élite ('You did not need to be educated to know this'). However, what I find more interesting is the suggestion that Nyokabi's satisfaction in motherhood is measured according to her son's achievements in the social matrix, and that this construction is naturalized as part of 'her mother's instinct'. Nyokabi's liberation from the oppressive social relations in Kenya will be experienced vicariously through Njoroge's upward mobility. When Njoroge graduates to secondary school, he is 'no longer the son of Ngotho but the son of the land' (105). Nevertheless, he is still Nyokabi's son, and it is this fact that constitutes Njoroge's personal crisis. It is to the enunciation of Njoroge's crisis that I now turn.

If there is a figure of the patriarch in Weep Not, Child, it would appear to find its embodiment in Ngotho. Njoroge secretly adores and fears his father (123) and his filial situation within the family is similar to that which Howlands has experienced as a child:

The joys, fears, and hopes of childhood were grand in their own way. The little quarrels he had had; the father whom he had feared and revered; the gentle mother in whose arms he could always find solace and comfort... (76)

Ngotho is a figure of supreme authority in the family; he governs it with a degree of equanimity, but this equanimity also functions to validate his authority and to contain the threat of rebellion from his wives:

Ngotho bought four pounds of meat. But they were bound into two bundles each of two pounds. One bundle was for his first wife, Njeri, and the other for Nyokabi, his second wife. A husband had to be wise in these

affairs otherwise a small flaw or apparent bias could easily generate a civil war in the family. Not that Ngotho feared this very much. He knew that his two wives liked each other and were good companions and friends. But you could not quite trust women. They were fickle and very jealous. When a woman was angry no amount of beating would pacify her. Ngotho did not beat his wives much. On the contrary, his home was well known for being a place of peace. All the same, one had to be careful. (11)

The feeling of oneness was a thing that distinguished Ngotho's household from many other polygamous families...This was attributed to Ngotho, the centre of the home. For if you have a stable centre, then the family will hold. (40)

Ngotho's control over the affairs of his family deteriorates as conditions in Kenya deteriorate. His inability to exert authority is most clearly evidenced in Boro's disdain for his father's moderate politics, and most especially in Ngotho's inability to command Boro's respect. Clifford B. Robson points out:

Boro's actions are always motivated by the memory of Mwangi and what he sees as his father's inertia, and both men are subject to the increasing pressure of complex events. Ngotho's decline as a stable head of the family is a result of his clash with Boro and leads to his rash action at the gathering when the crowd rush Jacobo. (1979)

The family's disintegration correlates with the disintegration of its patriarchal centre. Ngotho's crisis is a crisis of potency in the face of the emasculating political and economic tyranny of the Kenyan colonial administration and the comprador class which supports the administration. When Ngotho does confront the colonizing power by confessing to the murder of Jacobo, the response of the administration is to castrate him.

Njoroge's position in the family equates with his political position in the text. He fears his father and finds solace in his mother. Equally, he does not actively challenge or resist the colonial government (as Boro and Kamau do) but finds solace in his education. He is impotent in a double sense. Firstly, he does

not exercise his male privilege in relation to women's bodies (although he is circumcized) and he does not admit his sexual attraction to Mwihaki until it is too late. Secondly, he continually defers active engagement in political change by envisioning it as a future possibility. It is his christological vision which prevents him from assuming the phallic emblem of the gun⁸ and from facilitating an improved Kenya.

Cook and Okenimpke claim that the novel's ideological sympathies do not rest with Njoroge; they 'lie inevitably with the freedom fighters.' (1983: 56). I do not agree with this conception of Weep Not, Child. Njoroge's worldview is certainly not privileged in the text, but that of the Mau Mau insurgents is not valorized either. In fact, Ngugi's autography in relation to Mau Mau is revealing. His brother, Wallace Mwangi - a carpenter - was one of the forest fighters (Sicherman, 1990: 4), but the Mwangi of Weep Not, Child has died fighting for the British in World War 2. This is an important silence in the novel, and it evidences Ngugi's early ideological unease in relation to Mau Mau. Another revealing autographic moment in Ngugi's narrative occurs when a letter is left on the church wall at Njoroge's school:

'The letter said that the head of the headmaster plus the heads of forty children would be cut off if the school did not instantly close down. It was signed with Kimathi's name.' (83)

Nyokabi forbids him from attending the school, but Kamau persuades him to continue going. On one level, Kamau might be the one responsible for planting the letter (see the answers to the headmaster's questions, 82). On another level, Kamau (Njoroge's brother) does not attend school and has no reason to be there. Possibly, the Kamau mentioned in the passage is not Njoroge's brother. What I find more significant is that Kamau (an illiterate craftsman with Mau Mau sympathies) is so unqualified in his support for education. E. Carey Francis, Ngugi's headmaster at Alliance High School, recalls a similar incident:

Soon after the Lari massacre, 16 miles away, I went to a primary school...[where] Mau-Mau had been...the night before, and damaged the school, tearing down the doors and leaving broken windows and broken hinges. In the doorway there was a blackboard with a message written on it in Gikuyu: "If anyone teaches here after March 29 he will be killed, by order of Dedan Kimathi"....At another school something similar happened. There the message was a letter for the teacher saying "If the teacher comes here again he had better bring a basket for his head". (quoted in Sicherman, 1990: 395)

The Carey Francis account does not make it clear whether or not the school he visited was 16 miles away from the massacre or whether the massacre was 16 miles from his own school. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that one of the schools affected was Maanguu Karing'a school, which Ngugi was attending at the time (between 26 and 29 March 1953), and which is within 16 miles of Lari (cf. scale map in Sicherman, 1990: not paginated). Weep Not, Child displays Ngugi's attempts to redeem education (and therefore, his own position within Kenya's literate élite) by instrumentalizing the voices of Mau Mau insurgents: 'Boro had always shown a marked interest in Njoroge's progress at school' (69) might be recoded as 'Ngugi's interest in collapsing the class-differences between an educated élite and an illiterate peasant insurgency is marked by Boro's interest in Njoroge's progress'.

If there is an ideology which is privileged in the text, it is to be found in the most dominant (and most covert) voice in the novel - that of the narrator. This narratorial voice is partisan in relation to certain of the discourses and characters in the novel. I have already examined the narrator's counter-discourse which incorporates the biblical myth of the Ten Plagues. This myth is a continuous motif in the narrative. Jomo Kenyatta, the Black Moses, insists that the colonial authorities let his people go. Boro has told Kamau about Jomo, and Kamau relays this information to Njoroge (43). The narrator alludes to the myth when Jomo is tried by the colonial authorities:

Everyone knew that Jomo would win. God would not let his people alone. The children of Israel must win. Many people put all their hopes on this eventual victory. (72)

The myth of the Black Moses is what unites the fictional community of Weep Not, Child. This is not to say that all of the characters subscribe to this myth, but that they assume their discursive positions in relation to the discourse this myth represents. Moses' rebellion against the Egyptians is a principled, righteous rebellion (it is sanctioned by God the Father). Njoroge has high ideals regarding the liberation of the Kenyan people, but he does not act upon those ideals. By contrast, Boro actively resists the colonial authorities, but he does not do so to uphold a higher principle:

"Don't you believe in anything?"

"No. Nothing. Except revenge." (102)

Ngotho's traditionalism (which holds that the whiteman's demise has been predicted by the prophecies) is a complacent worldview; it has a spiritual basis, but lacks a coherent political praxis. These characters are representative of the conflicting discourses in the text, and the narratorial ideology attempts to consolidate these diffuse discourses. At this early stage in his development, Ngugi is formulating a brand of liberation theology - which will combine his Christian persuasions with political commitment. In A Grain of Wheat, Ngugi's liberation theology becomes more pronounced, although I would argue that it compromises Ngugi's political project in that novel.

Njoroge's relationship with Mwhaki operates on a denial of sexual attraction, and this is consistent with his subscription to Christian theology. This assumption may be substantiated if one examines Njoroge's understanding of his classmates' gossip:

Many stories went around about Isaka. Some said that he was *not a good Christian*. This meant he drank and smoked and went about with women, a thing no teacher was expected to do. (33, emphasis in the original)

Njoroge's initial failure to approach Mwihaki is reflected in the following passages:

After three weeks he made his mother angry. It was the fault of Mwihaki. She had asked him to wait for her so they might go home together. After all, their homes were near each other. Besides, she said she feared certain boys. Njoroge was pleased. (15)

Mwihaki said to him, "Why do you keep alone to avoid me?"

Njoroge felt ashamed. He still remembered that day his mother had met them both playing on the hill. She had not rebuked him. But a mother's silence is the worst form of punishment for it is left to one's imagination to conjure up what is in her mind. (35)

While the incident to which the passages refer is a relatively minor one in the novel, it contains a larger importance in the narrative as a whole. Firstly, it is Nyokabi who wishes her son to complete his education, and it is this education which contributes to preventing him from engaging in armed resistance and becoming a *man in his own right* (as Kamau and Boro do). Secondly, Njoroge wishes Mwihaki had been his sister and he comes to view their relation as a filial one:

He always wished she had been his sister. (55)

"I could be such a nice sister to you and I could cook you very tasty food and-"

He said, "Thank you, Mwihaki. You have been like a true sister to me." (107)

This construction of filiation between them serves as an obstruction in the way of any amorous affiliation. Further, the construction of a brother-sister relationship carries an implied third term: that of the parental figures which regulate that relationship by imposing the incest taboo upon it.

Njoroge is unable to escape an anxiety of (perceived) obligations to his parents (and, more particularly, obligations to his mother). In order to circumvent this anxiety, he

accommodates his desire for Mwihaki by placing her within the familial structure from which that anxiety emanates. This dynamic is expressed somatically in the text:

"When I come back, you will not let me alone?" she appealed, again her eyes dilating. *She was sitting close to him. She touched the collar of his shirt and then rubbed off an insect that was walking along it.* He looked at her in a brotherly fashion. He had now quickly forgotten their differences. To him she was a girl who might easily have been his sister. (96, emphasis added)

It is interesting to note that the increasing physical proximity of the two characters does not translate into an admission of their mutual attraction. I would argue that Mwihaki and Njoroge are placed in a relation of filiation in order to substitute for an amorous relation. The root of this substitution is ideological: a cross-class love-affair would collapse the class-delineations that Ngugi has so carefully constructed. When Mwihaki brushes off the insect, the action invokes her class-situation: her father derives his income from the cultivation of pyrethrum, which is used in insecticides. Further, one of the reasons that Njoroge derives pleasure from Mwihaki's companionship is the fact that she is situated in a more affluent class than his own:

It was sweet to play with a girl and especially if that girl came from a family higher on the social scale than one's own. (15)

The inclusion of the insect draws attention to the gender-ideological premises which inform the construction of filiation between Njoroge and Mwihaki. It provides a juncture at which the text illuminates what the narrative represses - the possibility of mutual desire between the children. This desire threatens to disrupt the circulation of desire upon which the narrative is predicated.

Pierre Macherey points out:

What is important in a work is what it does not say. This is not the same careless notation as 'what it refuses to say,' although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of *measuring silences*, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. But rather this, what the work cannot say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence. (1978: 87)

Njoroge and Muihaki are constructed with a vast erotic potential. Their mutual desire constitutes one of the major textual silences, because this desire would severely prejudice the text's phallogentric premises - that Njoroge's subscription to Christological discourse and to Western-style education places him in a position of emasculated complicity with the colonizing power.

There is another strategic silence in Weep Not, Child. When Njoroge and Kamau discuss the political situation in the country, Njoroge comments:

'Mr Howlands....I don't like him. I did not like the way his son followed me once.'
 'A lamb takes after its mother.'
 Something occurred to him.
 'Jacobo is a bad man. Do you think Muihaki-' He stopped.
 Then he quickly changed the subject... (43)

The upshot of Njoroge's omission is to hinder Kamau from passing political comment on his friend, and this example illustrates the tension between social and private commitments which obtains in Njoroge. The word which triggers the association with Muihaki is the word which problematizes her in Njoroge's eyes ('mother')⁹. In addition, both Njoroge and Muihaki take after their mothers in that both practice avoidance in relation to political matters. Njoroge does so by envisioning a future and doing little to facilitate that future and Muihaki does so by willing an escape from her country until the period of strife is at an end (see, for example, the letter, 112).

The two mothers, Nyokabi and Juliana, also practice avoidance

or, at best, non-confrontation in relation to political matters. When the strike is mooted, Nyokabi objects to Ngotho's prospective participation:

'But [Howlands] is paying you money. What if the strike fails?'

'Don't woman me!' he shouted hysterically. This possibility was what he feared most. She sensed this note of uncertainty and fear and seized upon it.

'What if the strike fails, tell me that!'

Ngotho could bear it no longer. She was driving him mad. He slapped her on the face and raised his hand again. (53)

On one level, Nyokabi's objection is based upon her interest in preserving the stability and prosperity of her family, but this private interest runs contrary to the collective interests of the oppressed peasantry. Nyokabi aspires to the upward mobility of her family and this interest finds its apotheosis in her ambition for Njoroge to receive an education.

However, this passage is of interest because it constitutes an example of Ngugi's patriarchal ideology betraying its instability at precisely the moment when it manifests most violently in his text. If political and economic protest is predicated upon male potency, the possibility of failure must also include the possibility of impotence. This assertion is demonstrated in Ngotho's reaction to the suggestion of failure; his exclamation, 'Don't woman me!', suggests that it is Nyokabi's womanhood, her otherness, which destabilizes the fixity of the me, or male self. Further, Ngotho's action is *qualified* by the adverb 'hysterically', which admits the other (as difference) to return to the male self, but only as the unstable womb (*hyster*). Ngotho retrieves his former status as unchallenged decision-maker in the family by committing violence upon Nyokabi. This violence serves to reappropriate, re-subjugate and re-contain her as other. Cixous' theoretical framework illuminates this appropriation:

The paradox of otherness is that...at no moment in History is it tolerated or possible as such. The other is only there to be reappropriated, recaptured,

destroyed as other. (1986: 71)

The slap is (like the bullet and sexual intercourse) a means of appropriation by physical conquest. It re-aligns the other by placing her in a position subsumed by the category of the same; she becomes a disciple to his discipline¹⁰.

The confrontation between Nyokabi and Ngotho originates in the conflict between two state apparatuses: politics (the domain of the male) and the family (the domain of the male and, to a lesser extent, the responsibility of the female). This confrontation is not specific to Nyokabi's family; an equivalent confrontation has taken place between Juliana and Jacobo, and it is to this confrontation that Juliana alludes after Ngotho has led the striking labourers in a charge against Jacobo at the rally:

Then Juliana burst out sobbing, speaking to herself. "I have always said that such Ahoi [tenant farmers] were dangerous. But a man will never heed the voice of a woman until it is too late. I told him not to go. But he would not listen!...I have always said that your father will end up by being murdered!" (56)

Juliana's words prove to be prophetic, but her objection to Jacobo's actions places her argument in a prudential context which resembles Nyokabi's political position. While an interesting structural tension results from the similarity of the two wives' objections, it is evident that to heed their warnings would be to permit the economic *status quo* to persist. Since Ngotho and Jacobo ignore their interjections, the class-struggle becomes explicitly confrontational and precipitates the events which follow. The upshot of Ngugi's placement of women in a reactionary discourse is that women are excluded from political discussion in the text¹¹. This enables the patriarchal ideology of the author (and of the Symbolic Order he represents) to misplace women so that they are representatives of phallographic discourse, rather than achieving political representation within - or outside of - the male-dominated Symbolic. This misplacement is most overt in the construction of Mwihaki, who is, like

Njoroge, the locus of the discourses which contest Weep Not, Child.

Mwihaki is the most ambivalent of the female figures in the novel. Her father is a member of the landed class, which is represented as complicit with colonial Capitalist domination. Her mother, Juliana, has the propensity to import ideologies alien to Gikuyu culture, and to translate these foreign ideologies into normative structures that validate the relative privilege which her class enjoys. At a Christmas meal at her house, she admonishes Njoroge for laughing during grace:

But her children would never have done such a thing. She had brought them up to value *Ustaarabu*, and the rules of good manners. She had concluded her speech by saying that it was her considered opinion that all children should be brought up as she did hers. Because people, however, did not do this, she never liked her children to associate with primitive homes. (18-19)

The free indirect discourse in the passage enables Ngugi to ironize Juliana's class-prejudices which are, in part, based on *Ustaarabu*. This latter term carries a weight of pejorative connotations in terms of the Kenyan colonial situation. Carol Sicherman's linguistic glossary (1990: 233) reveals that it is of Kiswahili, rather than Gikuyu, origin. It takes its etymological root from the word 'arab', which may implicate its adherents in a subscription to codes of behaviour established by the first (known) colonizers of Africa. It translates roughly as 'civilization' or 'culture' and is 'considered the embodiment of civilization at [the Kenyan] coast'.

However, Mwihaki's ambivalence consists in the fact that she neither strictly adheres to, nor vehemently opposes, her parents and the class-consciousness which they represent. Whereas Juliana admonishes Njoroge for his lack of 'manners', Mwihaki 'takes a greater interest in him' (19). Similarly, Mwihaki defends Njoroge when he first arrives at the school. As a *Njuka* (newcomer), he is expected to be subservient to the older children, but she

defiantly claims him as her *Njuka* (13-14). Nevertheless, despite Mwihaki's qualities of generosity and strength of character, these qualities are subordinated to her ideological construction. For example, the difference between Njoroge and Mwihaki in the following extract may be viewed as a difference in class-consciousness:

They soon forgot their parents and laughed. Sometimes they played. Njoroge was more reserved. But Mwihaki was more playful. She picked flowers and threw them at him. He liked this and wanted to retaliate but he did not like plucking a flower in bloom because it lost colour. He said, "Let's not play with flowers."
"Oh, but I love flowers." (36)

Njoroge is a member of the dispossessed peasantry (the *ahoi*) which is constructed as loving the land which was once its own. His reverence for the flowers may well indicate a subtext of preservation of the land and that which issues from it. This reading would be supported by reference to the myth of legation and proprietorship (23-24) recounted by Ngotho. By contrast, Mwihaki is a member of the landed class, which is constructed as being possessed of *bourgeois* acquisitiveness, and which has abandoned the ways of the Gikuyu through the internalization of foreign cultural practices.

Significantly, Mwihaki's father's livelihood derives from the cultivation of pyrethrum flowers. If Mwihaki's class is able to consume the benefits of the land, this is more graphically depicted when she meets with Njoroge before he departs for Siriana Secondary School:

It was a year now since he and Mwihaki had been to the same hill. Mwihaki had not changed much. She now ate blade after blade of grass. (105)

There is, however, a more subtle textual marker which creates ideological distinctions between characters - that of the clothes they wear.

Firstly, clothing demarcates class differences: Njoroge is ashamed to be seen by Mwhaki in his calico sacking because it is the sign of his poverty and because - somewhat significantly - the wind might raise it to reveal the lower half of his body (19). Lucia, Mwhaki's sister and Njoroge's teacher:

...wore a white blouse and a green skirt. Njoroge liked the white and green because it was like a blooming flower on a green plant. (14)

Lucia is doubly implicated in the subjection of the peasantry, since she is the daughter of a landowner (Jacobo) and is a functionary of the coercive educational system (14). Her clothing is therefore the sign of property and privilege, and her actions reveal the subjection which enforces that privilege. Njoroge's response to her clothing reveals his own ideological construction.

Secondly, clothing is the sign of cultural difference, which the text allies - perhaps simplistically - with class-privilege under colonialism. Mwhaki returns to the village with a:

...glossy mass of deep black hair [which] had been dressed in a peculiar manner, alien to the village. This immediately reminded Njoroge of Lucia... (86)

Mwhaki meets Njoroge the following Sunday, wearing clothes which possibly signify her position between colonizer and colonized, between white ruler and black peasant:

Her white, low-necked blouse and pleated brown skirt made him feel ashamed of his clothes. (88)

The red jerseys of the homeguards remind Njoroge of the dead barber (92), which reflects upon the brutality born out of their affiliation with the colonizer.

The mechanism of identification effected by description in the text may be taken, rather literally, as an exemplum of what Mary

Jacobus argues in quite another context: that 'it is clothes that wear us and not we them' (1983: 4). She argues that there may be:

...no gender identity except as constituted by clothes, or by language - just as there is no 'literal' meaning to oppose to metaphor, but only metaphors of literalness. (1983: 4)

The relevance of this argument to Ngugi's novel becomes more overt if the reader questions the ideological trappings with which the characters in the novel are clothed.

The first ideological assertion made by the author of Weep Not, Child is that woman has no subjectivity except that which is afforded her by her submission to patriarchal authority - and the silencing that this submission entails. This authority is problematized by the intervention of colonial domination, against which the Gikuyu men must militate. The title of the novel implies this ideological construction: "Weep Not, Child" is a placation addressed to the figure of the child who suffers under the events of the Emergency in colonial Kenya, and the character in the novel who cries most abundantly is Mwihaki (13, 56, 94, 107, 132-134). It is Njoroge's inadequate social vision which translates into an inability to console her (132-134). This construction is also aligned with gender polarization under a patriarchal discourse: the male is represented as the heroic gallant in whose strength the injured female (prone to emotional outbursts) may find solace and protection:

Teacher What does a woman say when she sees danger?
Class (the boys looking triumphantly at the girls)
 Uuuuuuu. (34)

"I'm so lonely here," [Mwihaki] at last said, with a frank, almost childish hurt voice. "Everyone avoids me."
 [Njoroge's] heart beat tom-tom. His sense of gallantry made him say, "Let's meet on Sunday." (87)

Female subjectivity in Ngugi's text is constructed in order to

validate the political struggle waged by men. The notion of a vulnerable female subject facilitates an ethos of chivalry within the liberation struggle, by which any act of resistance (even the cold-blooded killing of a loyalist, 63) assumes the non-essential attribute of noble bravado.

Perhaps the most subtle ideological construction in the text is that which locates the figure of the mother within liberatory discourse, and which appropriates her biological functions (nature) in the service of political activity (culture). In the chapter entitled 'INTERLUDE', several disembodied voices hold a dialogue on the initiation of the resistance which would later become known as *Mau Mau*. The voices are male (as the form of address indicates - 'brother', 62) and they articulate, and therefore control, the political dissent from which the female characters are excluded ('My wife is waiting [at home] for me', 62). They discuss the murder of the loyalist and valorize his assassins as 'daring'. One of the voices (an internal - or intradiegetic - character-narrator) is the more authoritative than the other. This voice derives its relative authority from the fact that it is given to exposition and is thus an agent of the narrative. The other is given to interrogation ('"Like Jacobo?"', '"Tell us it all again."') and is therefore an instrument of the narrative. The character-narrator then commands another character:

"Woman, add more wood to the fire and light the lantern, for darkness falls... Now, the..." (63)

Interestingly, the female character is constructed by speech and she does not respond. (She) is parenthesized by male speech because 'she' is a term included in it and defined by it. Cixous comments, in a similar vein, on the marginalization of women in social struggles:

'We' struggle together, yes, but, who is this we? A man and beside him a thing, a somebody - (a woman: always in her parenthesis, always repressed or invalidated as a woman, tolerated as a non-woman,

'accepted'!)...I look for myself throughout the centuries and I don't see myself anywhere. (1986: 75)

The internal narrator suspends his narrative in order that the female character may produce those conditions conducive to a comfortable narration: the environment is dark and the speaker requires light and warmth. The text assumes her compliance, as does the reader, for the narrative continues after this interjection. At the level of the words printed on the page, the space allocated to female speech is represented by ellipsis, which the Oxford Dictionary defines as an 'omission from [a] sentence of words needed to complete [the] construction or sense' (seventh edition, 1983: 312). The words which are omitted are (as Cixous - critiquing Freud - would have it) an exemplum of the female subject as defined by lack. They are the words she must find to define herself.

However, the interruption of the internal narrator's narrative has a more symbolic import. The second part of the novel is entitled 'DARKNESS FALLS' (65). In the context of the liberatory discourse of the novel, the darkness represents the period of resistance, societal turmoil and uncertainty which obtains in the land after Kenyatta has been incarcerated. The 'light' which will dispel this darkness is the liberation movement, Mau Mau. If it is woman's duty to produce 'fuel for the fire', this finds its material equivalent in the production of children who will form the mainstay of resistance to Western cultural, political and economic domination. In other words, the emptiness or lack which defines woman in the passage is signified by her empty womb, which only becomes a full signifier once it has been inseminated by men. The 'INTERLUDE' therefore functions as a gestational period in the narrative: before the narrative of Gikuyu (and Kenyan) history may continue, woman must produce and reproduce the commodity which the resistance movement (the post-colonial state in embryonic form) requires: that of manpower. The internal narratee in the 'INTERLUDE' alludes to patrilinearity when he exclaims '"This generation."' (63). My analysis of the 'INTERLUDE' is consistent with Cixous' formulation of 'writing

between' the lines of the patriarchal Law:

Writing is working; being worked; questioning (in) the between (letting oneself be questioned) of same and of other without which nothing lives; undoing death's work by willing the togetherness of one-another...A course that multiplies transformations by the thousands. (1986: 86)

Finally, although it would appear that Weep Not, Child is constructed by discourses which mis-place woman in order to enable their own reconstruction as artifices - Ngotho 'no longer [looks] anyone straight in the face; not even his wives' (81) after Njeri and Kori are arrested¹² - a reading of the novel which labels it 'purely patriarchal' would be simplistic and misguided.

There are several textual junctures at which Ngugi problematizes the phallocratic discourse which undergirds his text. Njoroge vocalizes the apocalypse which Mwihaki's teacher predicts (and which Kenya may become) and frightens her in the process:

"It is very hard to imagine everything destroyed - I mean flattened out on a plain like this one. You imagine the blood and the bones of all people, white and black, mine and yours, all..."
 "Stop!" She shut her eyes as if she did not want to see the sight of a lake of blood and a plain of bones.
 "I see you are afraid," he said, again trying to smile indulgently. He truly felt brave because she was afraid, and she was only a woman, a girl. (93)

There is an authorial irony at play in this incident, due to the fact that Njoroge draws his courage from Mwihaki's weakness, her lack. Further, 'she was only a woman, a girl' demonstrates that Njoroge is consciously correcting his perception of Mwihaki in order to downgrade her status in his eyes. If she is only a woman, the words would seem to imply that she inhabits a position of less importance than that occupied by men. However, the necessity of an adjustment of Mwihaki's status to that of girlhood implies that it is her womanhood which subverts

Njoroge's assumption of male superiority. Ngugi reveals Njoroge's 'bravery' to be predicated on a hierarchization of gendered subjectivities.

A more subtle irony comes to the fore when Njeri comments on the unfairness of Jomo Kenyatta's trial:

Nyokabi said, "I knew he would lose. I always said that white men are the same. His lawyers must have been bribed."

"It is more than that," said Njeri. "And although I am only a woman and cannot explain it, it seems all as clear as daylight. The white man makes a law or a rule. Through that rule or law or what you may call it, he takes away the land and then imposes many laws on the people concerning that land and many other things, all without people agreeing first as in the old days of the tribe. Now a man rises and opposes that law which made right the taking away of the land. Now that man is taken by the same people who made the laws which that man was fighting. He is tried under those alien rules. Now tell me who is that man who can win even if the angels of God were his lawyers ...I mean."

Njeri was panting. Njoroge had never heard her speak for such a long time. Yet there seemed to be something in what she had said. (75)

It would not be difficult to discern a paternalistic construction of Njeri at this point: her purported (but contradicted) inability to 'explain' events would be consistent with the exclusion of women from political discourse, with which this chapter has previously been engaged. Her lack of legitimation is closely aligned with her lack of a phallus and her consequent exclusion from the 'Law', which Cixous defines as '...the petrifying result of not-knowing reinforced by the power that produces it' (1986: 103). However, despite Njeri's disclaimer, her halting sentences, the non-specificity of her allusions and her trailing conclusion, her speech contains a forceful rhetoric which crystallizes the structures of dominance upon which the colonial administration is predicated. This forceful rhetoric is also invested in Nyakinyua in Petals of Blood, although Nyakinyua's voice is recuperated for patriarchy in quite a different way. Further, Njeri's speech exposes the inefficacy of

christology as a liberatory discourse. Njeri's construction here is a tightly-controlled deviation from patriarchal and christological ideologies. Ngugi grants her the power of acute observation regarding the injustice of Kenyatta's trial - a sense of injustice which he undoubtedly shares. Nevertheless, he limits her ability to express her observation in language which equals the perspicuity of those observations. The free indirect discourse ('Yet there seemed to be something in what she had said') invokes an extremely qualified (almost grudging) agreement on the part of her audience. I would argue that this passage indicates Ngugi's ambivalence towards Njeri's speech. On one level, he would appear to be upholding the privileged domain of male speech - in which a self-present subject's utterances reflect the subject's intentions and communicate shared meanings. On another, he would appear to be breaking with (or at least subverting) the patriarchal orthodoxy, by permitting female speech to negotiate the untheorizable desire of the (sexed) other. The reasons for the author's ambivalence are unclear. Does it indicate an inner conflict with regard to male domination of, and women's appropriation into, the Symbolic Order, or is the author merely making concessions to asymmetrically-opposing gender-political standpoints? I would argue that both possibilities are in evidence and that Ngugi attempts, unsuccessfully, to break with a phallogocratic discourse, resulting in a rather heavy-handed tokenism in this passage.

In addition, it is a minor female character who contests the racist communal discourse (which takes Indian shopkeepers as its referent) and who points out the need for economic infrastructure:

And one day an old poor woman said, "Let Africans stick together and charge very low prices. We are all black. If this be not so, then why grudge a poor old woman the chance to buy from someone, be he white or red, who charges less money for his things?" (8)

More importantly, it is Mwihaki who interrogates Njoroge's idealistic vision of a new Kenya. She exposes the inconsistency

of a utopian politics which is not rooted in social realities:

"You are always talking about tomorrow, tomorrow. You are always talking about the country and the people. What is tomorrow? And what is the People and the Country to you?" (106)

Later, she and Njoroge have reversed their ideological positions: he wills flight from Kenya, while she realizes the obligations which she has at home. Ironically, she has adopted the vision which he has abandoned, although it would appear that she is also aware of the necessity for a commitment to family and community:

"We had better wait. You told me that the sun will rise tomorrow. I think you were right."

He looked at her tears and wanted to wipe them. She sat there, a lone tree defying the darkness, trying to instil new life into him. But he did not want to live. Not this kind of life. He felt betrayed.

"All that was a dream. We can only live today."

"Yes. But we have a duty. Our duty to other people is our biggest responsibility as grown men and women."

"Duty! Duty!" he cried bitterly.

"Yes, I have a duty, for instance to my mother..." (133-134)

However, despite Mwhiki's determination to reconstruct Kenya (which locates her within the realm of political/social activity) Ngugi's construction of her contains a patriarchal subtext. She is described as 'a lone tree defying the darkness', which imbricates her in the traditionalist myth of origin which Ngũgĩ recounts:

"But in this, at the foot of Kerinyaga, a tree rose. At first it was a small tree and grew up, finding a way even through the darkness. It wanted to reach the light, and the sun. This tree had *Life*. (23-24, emphasis in the original text)

This is perhaps an instance of Ngugi situating women on either side of the present. The tree represents both an idyllic past and a utopian future. It embodies or possesses 'Life', and might thus be equated with the reproductive functions of woman, inasmuch as

both are situated on the periphery of the present.

Further, Mau Mau insurgents hid in forests during the Emergency. The fact that Njoroge chooses 'the tree' (135; definite article emphasized) upon which to hang himself suggests that he is a failure in both political/military and sexual conquest. In Christian discourse, the tree evokes an association between Njoroge - who has profited from his education, at the expense of his family, which is destroyed - and Judas, the disciple who betrayed Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, and who hanged himself in a field. Alternatively, the tree refers to the crucifix itself (which is sometimes depicted as the 'Tree of Life' which reverses the consequence of the 'Tree of (carnal) Knowledge' in the Garden of Eden). Within both the Christian and liberatory novelistic discourses, the tree connotes an individual interest which runs contrary to the interests of the (societal/familial) collective. However, it is clear that Ngugi is not sympathetic towards the aims and strategies of Mau Mau at this point in his development. Rather, his early heroes are representative of his position as a Christian and a member of the intellectual (literate) élite. Njoroge's abandonment of the tree constitutes a return to the communal responsibility which his mothers (and later, Muihaki) have come to represent.

The conclusion of the novel is ambivalent. Njoroge is allotted a place among women because of his 'cowardice'. However, although this would seem to place him in a position of relative inferiority when compared with those male characters whose resistance to colonial authority is more courageous (Boro, Kamau and, in the final instance, Ngotho), the gains made by these characters are insubstantial - their family has disintegrated and it has even less property than that with which it began. It is therefore left to women to lead those who remain into the future.

The inherent ambivalence in Ngugi's construction of female subjectivity may perhaps be explained by reference to Sandra

Gilbert's introduction to The Newly Born Woman, in which she draws upon Sherry Ortner's article, *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?*:

...Ortner argues that although women's production of signs aligns them with (human) society, their reproductive functions identify them with the (animal) body, so they are universally perceived 'as being closer to nature than [are] men.' Thus, the female role represents 'something intermediate between culture and nature, lower on the scale of transcendence than man.' Such a position 'on the continuous periphery of culture's clearing,' she explains, would account easily for both the subversive feminine symbols (witches, evil eye, menstrual pollution, castrating mothers) and the feminine symbols of transcendence (mother goddesses, merciful dispensers of salvation)'. (1986: xviii)

In Ngugi's early novels, where the land hunger of the Gikuyu peasantry after colonization is a predominant feature, the subaltern woman becomes a useful metaphor which translates the means by which the path (or *via media*) to independence may be negotiated. 'Woman' is thus produced as a sign for circulation between colonizer and colonized, in order that a return of, and a return to the land, may be transacted. My third chapter will focus on the cultural production of 'woman' under Gikuyu nationalism.

Despite the conclusion of Weep Not, Child, which seems to suggest that the figure of woman (embodied in Nyokabi) is likely to play a part in the transition to Kenyan independence, the temporal situation of Nyokabi in the text contains a problematic. This problematic inheres in the fact that Nyokabi is equated with a past which has been superseded by colonization¹³ and a future that has not yet been realized. The female subject is constructed as falling on either side of the present (she is absent) while being reified as the terrain over which the struggle of the present is fought.

In short, Ngugi locates 'woman' outside of history. Cixous would view this dynamic as being consistent with the condition

of woman throughout history:

Woman's voyage: as a body. As if she were destined - in the distribution established by men (separated from the world where cultural exchanges are made and kept on the wings of the social stage when it is a case of History) - to be the nonsocial, nonpolitical, nonhuman half of the living structure...And whereas he takes...the risk and responsibility of being an agent, a bit of the public scene where transformations are played out, she represents indifference or resistance to this active tempo; she is the principle of consistency, always somehow the same, everyday and eternal. (1986: 66)

Some critics have not found the positioning of characters such as Nyokabi and Njeri problematical. Rather, they have emphasized that it is precisely the consistency of the female characters in the novel which gives its representations credibility. Jennifer Evans asserts:

...Njoroge's two mothers [and some of the female characters from all of the novels prior to Devil on the Cross] are all in their own ways 'resistance heroines' and the strongest symbols of cultural identity, community and continuity that these novels have to offer. (1987: 131)

and Cook and Okenimpke add:

Those who point the way are, as so often in Ngugi, the mother figures, Nyokabi and Njeri. They, throughout, have been positive characters, the centre of harmonious collaboration in Ngotho's family, involved with other people, concerned and informed about their environment. The rescue and possible rehabilitation of Njoroge is their triumph, and this, with all its overtones and undertones, is the concluding event of the book, reversing the negative trends, and thrusting us out hopefully, actively into an unknown future. (1983: 67)

I would argue that Ngugi's construction of Nyokabi and Njeri ('the devoted'; Meyer, 1991: 33) is informed by religious/mythic productions of woman as nurturer and homemaker, and this entrenches traditional female rôles and reinforces patriarchal

privilege. Nevertheless, these critics point to a certain quietism and continuity, an enduring dutifulness in relation to the maintenance of the social order on the part of the female characters, which demands respect despite the fact that it would be anathema to the activism of a Cixous or Clement. The usefulness of feminism as an analytical discourse consists in elaborating that it is precisely this dutifulness which expends itself to produce the phallocratic economy, which, in turn, forecloses a negotiation of female desire and parenthesizes female speech.

One might also concede that, at this formative stage in Ngugi's development as an author, feminist awareness was only beginning to achieve popular recognition in Europe and America, and that a feminist reading of Weep Not, Child is an exercise in futility. However, Elleke Boehmer defends the worth of such an exercise:

In particular, as the focus [of the early novels] is more on the remote past and the pristine origins of the Gikuyu people [and on an uncertain future], the mother figures are important...the mothers suffer and find fulfilment in so far as they can give expression to their maternal instincts and thus satisfy their husband's demands; Mwihaki...Muthoni and the younger Nyambura...in their courage and endurance, may be seen as potential Mumbi's, and, like Mumbi, are consistently viewed only in their relation to men. Mwihaki...gives Njoroge strength when he is wavering, yet the ideals which she upholds are based upon what he has taught her...Yet [such] stereotypes are predictable: at this stage Ngugi had not yet come out in support of sexual equality, let alone of class-conflict. But it is for this very reason that the characterization of women in the early novels provides a useful point of reference. Here Ngugi upholds the patriarchal order by establishing archetypal roles and patterns of relationships that will continue, albeit in transmuted form, into the later novels. (1991: 193)

In this chapter, I have examined the psychosexual disparities which inform Ngugi's writing and which contribute to the marginalization of the subaltern woman in Weep Not, Child. Although these disparities engender Gikuyu male prerogatives in the text, and originate in the novel's contradictory ideological

formations, the reason for their existence remains unclear. Why does the novel construct gender hierarchies which replicate those which inform the organization of gender in Europe? Why does Ngugi draw upon these (alien?) binary oppositions to inform his political vision? It is not enough to simply collapse the obvious cultural differences between the male colonizer and the male colonized and thereby resurrect a unified patriarchy under which black and white women may forge a sisterhood, despite the class and race asymmetries which divide them. Rather, it becomes necessary to examine Kenyan history (and Gikuyu traditionalism's reinscription by Gikuyu nationalism in particular) in order to establish those culturally-specific material conditions which inform the construction of the sign 'woman' in the Gikuyu patriarchy, as well as the reasons for which it became necessary to deny Gikuyu women a political voice issuing from a triply politicized body. The point at which the larger idealized/metaphysical binarities - which accompany the acquisition of a culturally and linguistically-coded female subjectivity - emerge, is the point at which the female body is appropriated, and its desire silenced, by the male-dominated Symbolic. If the sign 'woman' is produced in and by an exchange which solidifies the relations between men, then the point at which the Gikuyu indigene acquires her cultural significance is the point at which her body acquires value for exogamy - during the rite of circumcision. In addition, the circumcision debate provides an ideal historical juncture at which one may interrogate the tacit collusion between the patriarchies of colonizer and colonized, as well as the adoption of the Gikuyu woman's body as a metaphor for a nationalist ideal (which, in turn, informs all of Ngugi's work, in one or another permutation).

Chapter 3

The Production of 'Woman' in *The River Between*

In this chapter I would like to examine the production of the sign 'woman' in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's second novel *The River Between*. The analysis of signs and of signifying systems in the novel is only viable if one examines the movements of history which have facilitated and necessitated the production of signs. Equally, it is important to examine the subject-formation of the historical subject, (James) Ngugi, who acts as an agent of particular discursive practices, motivated by specific ideological interests. *The River Between* provides insight into a pivotal moment in Kenyan history - that of the Kenyan circumcision debate¹. This historical moment is useful for three reasons. Firstly, it highlights the contest between conflicting power bases (traditionalism, education, Christian revivalism) in colonial Kenya. Secondly, the debate is particularly revealing of the subaltern's production as a subject under conflicting discourses, and her marginalization from political debate (inasmuch as she becomes the very terms of the debate). Thirdly, Ngugi's re-presentation of the debate in the novel points to his own ideological unease in relation to the discourses which inform the novel.

The circumcision debate erupted in Gikuyuland in 1928 when several of the missions located there (most notably the Church of Scotland Mission) initiated a campaign against clitoridectomy and required their followers to renounce both the custom and membership of the Kenya Central Association, a traditionalist party of which Jomo Kenyatta was the general-secretary. The Gikuyu, under the leadership of the KCA, initiated a counter-campaign of protests, letters to the press and pro-circumcision politicking. The mission schools instructed pupils that circumcised students would not be admitted. In the short term, the debate cost the missions most of their adherents, although many later returned. More importantly, it provided the KCA with

history, social organization and sense of identity. Clitoridectomy produced a crisis for the missionaries because the liberal-humanist discourse which informed their activity meant that they could only recognize the Gikuyu subject's common humanity so long as that humanity was constituted in the image of the West.

The Gikuyus' argument was more complex - at least, from an outsider's point of view. Jomo Kenyatta's account of clitoridectomy, which Ngugi follows in The River Between, is the clearest exposition of the ritual and its importance in Gikuyu culture. In Facing Mount Kenya, Kenyatta describes circumcision as 'a deciding factor in giving a boy or a girl the status of manhood or womanhood in the Gikuyu community' (1968: 133). He continues:

No proper Gikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised, and vice versa. It is taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with someone who has not undergone this operation. (1968: 132)

Further, those 'detribalized' Gikuyu who do wish to settle down with an uncircumcized partner would not enjoy the blessing of their family and would face exclusion from the homestead, disinheritance and, therefore, landlessness. Kenyatta continues:

It is important to note that the moral code of the tribe is bound up with this custom and that it symbolizes the unification of the whole tribal organization...The *irua* (ceremony) marks the commencement of participation in various governing groups in the tribal administration, because the real age-groups begin from the day of the physical operation. The history and legends of the people are explained and remembered according to the names given to various age-groups at the time of the initiation ceremony. (1968: 134)

More importantly, the parents of the initiates become members of the governing council of elders (*kiama*) subsequent to the initiation of their first child. The ceremony is thus central to

the social organization and the organization of power within the Gikuyu community. However, circumcision is also of crucial importance to the organization of sexual difference and male privilege in the community:

Before initiation it is considered right and proper for boys to practice masturbation as a preparation for their future sexual activities. Sometimes two or more boys compete in this, to see which can show himself more active than the rest...Masturbation among girls is considered wrong, and if a girl is seen touching that part of her body she is at once told that she is doing wrong. It may be said that this, among other reasons, is probably the motive of trimming the clitoris, to prevent girls from developing sexual feelings around that point. (Kenyatta, 1938: 162)

Clitoridectomy is thus tantamount to an appropriation of female desire by the male-dominated Symbolic Order. Allied with this appropriation is a series of cultural relations which the operation enacts and institutes. It not only dispossesses Gikuyu women of the seat of somatic pleasure, but also dispossesses them of material possessions. Becoming a woman among the Gikuyu means submitting to exclusion from the ownership and inheritance of land and from access to political decision-making. In short, clitoridectomy enacts the relations of male dominance and female submission which constitute the patriarchal order.

The Gikuyu woman's body is instrumentalized in the establishment of male prerogatives. She is allocated an important 'place' (or *topos*) within culture, in spite of the fact that she will never own that place. Her body founds the (male) right to property, the male prerogative in the homestead, male accession to power, the male-defined dialectic of desire. Her desire (which exceeds her reproductive functions) is effaced in order to naturalize her subjection in culture. Spivak is apposite here:

Male and female sexuality are asymmetrical. Male orgasmic pleasure "normally" entails the male reproductive act - semination. Female orgasmic pleasure (it is not of course the "same" pleasure, only called by the same name) does not entail any one

element of the heterogenous female reproductive scenario: ovulation, fertilization, conception, gestation, birthing. The clitoris escapes reproductive framing. In legally defining woman as an object of exchange, passage or possession in terms of reproduction, it is not only the womb that is literally "appropriated"; it is the clitoris as signifier of the sexed subject that is effaced. All historical and theoretical investigation into the definition of woman as legal *object* - in or out of marriage; or as politico-economic passageway for property and legitimacy would fall within the investigation of the varieties of the effacement of the clitoris. (*French Feminism in an International Frame*, 1987: 151)

As we will see, the Kenyan struggle for independence and the colonial struggle for legitimacy (during Mau Mau) was constructed around this effacement.

There was far more at stake in the circumcision debate than the Gikuyu woman's right to determine whether or not to submit her body to clitoridectomy. In fact, her assenting or dissenting voice was never an issue in the debate. Rather, the central issue in the debate was the material composition of the Kenyan state. In order to clarify this point, I will make use of Louis Althusser's essay, *Ideology and the State*. Althusser argues that the capitalist state reproduces itself in two ways. Firstly, it must reproduce the skills and materials required for production. Secondly, it must reproduce the labour force's submissive relationship to the organizational hierarchy of the state:

To put this more scientifically, I shall say that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words'. In other words, the school (but also other State institutions like the church...) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its practice. (1993: 6-7)

Althusser claims that the ruling ideology of the state is promulgated by *Ideological State Apparatuses* (ISA's), which include the religious ISA (the system of different churches) and the educational ISA (the school system). ISA's such as these become 'not only the stake, but also the site of class struggle' (1993: 21) in the proletariat's attempts to ward off the ruling classes' exploitation and to seize control of the state. In pre-Independence Kenya, the Christian church's contribution to colonialism was to ensure a docile populace, which could look forward to the Kingdom of Heaven in the afterlife while enduring servitude on Earth. Equally, the school system functioned to produce an African élite, who would emerge as a buffer class between the settler neo-aristocracy and the Kenyan peasantry. In other words, the ideological state apparatuses constituted by the school system and the missions enabled and perpetuated the exploitative social formations in colonial Kenya. In political terms, the circumcision debate marks a decisive juncture in the history of Gikuyu resistance to colonial rule. The emergence of the independent schools and the African churches was tantamount to the emergence of powerful new ISA's in the Kenyan state, instituting a counter-colonial discourse. These ISA's, like the Gikuyu nationalism they fostered, had their ideological roots in Gikuyu traditionalism. The advent of Mau-Mau, twenty years later, may be viewed as an attempt, by the Gikuyu, to usurp the Repressive State Apparatuses (the army, the police, the homeguard, the courts) which enforced the last vestiges of colonial domination in Kenya.

While the debate may have had far-reaching consequences for the Gikuyu populace, the central figure in the debate - the Gikuyu indigene - is conspicuously silent. This silence may be understood in terms of Althusser's remark that '[ideology] represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (1993: 36). In terms of this formulation, the indigene's subjective identity is produced by the ritual of circumcision and its attendant cultural implications - it was only by submitting to clitoridectomy that

the Gikuyu woman could call herself a Gikuyu woman. Equally, it was only by refusing to be circumcized that the Kenyan Christian woman could call herself a Christian woman. In Althusser's terms: 'all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects' (1993: 47). Despite the animosity which developed on both sides, the upshot of the circumcision debate was the production of a regime of signs in which the Gikuyu patriarchy and the colonial patriarchy colluded to silence the subaltern. Evidence of this collusion may be found in the strikingly similar conclusions that Kenyatta and the missionaries drew from the events in 1931: that circumcision was a custom ingrained in Gikuyu culture, and that it was best left to die out by itself². Although the Gikuyu traditionalist community was the only party in the debate which advocated clitoridectomy, the missionaries' Christological belief-system entailed the suppression of the clitoris by a more subtle mechanism - as an example, one might cite the myth of the Immaculate Conception (as Levin's article, quoted below, does), in which Mary's motherhood is co-extensive with a lack of participation in the act of coitus, which in turn constitutes an effacement of female desire: Mary is an icon of 'woman' defined exclusively as a mothering-function. Spivak comments:

Psychological investigation in this area cannot only confine itself to the effect of clitoridectomy on women. It would also ask why and show how, since at least symbolic clitoridectomy has always been the "normal" accession to womanhood and the unacknowledged name of motherhood [Spivak refers here to Freud's assertion that women's psychosexual maturity rests upon a change from 'active' clitoral to 'passive' vaginal orgasm], it might be necessary to plot out the entire geography of female sexuality in terms of the imagined possibility of the dismemberment of the phallus. The arena of research here is not merely remote and primitive societies...The pre-comprehended suppression or effacement of the clitoris relates to every move to define woman as sex-object, or as means or agent of reproduction - with no recourse to a subject-function except in terms of those definitions or as "imitators" of men. (*French Feminism in an International Frame*, 1987: 151)

The upshot of the collusion between colonial-Christological and traditionalist-nationalist ideologues in the circumcision debate was that both camps decided upon a shared referent (the peasant woman) and differed only as to whether she should be symbolically or physically clitoridectomized. On both sides, the difference inhered in a lack of shared meaning - in feminist terms, however, the political differences between the two patriarchies are purely semantic.

Ngugi's own subjective formation is an uneasy synthesis of the colonial and counter-colonial ideologies which competed for primacy in the circumcision debate. He was born into a family of *ahoi* (tenant farmers) and, although his parents were located within the Gikuyu peasantry, they distrusted Gikuyu traditionalism. Their landlords were devout members of the Church of Scotland Mission. The first three years of education Ngugi received were at a mission school (Kamaandura). He then transferred to the Maanguua Karing'a school, which was one of the independent schools, and underwent circumcision at the age of fifteen. He then attended Alliance High School, where he became 'rather too serious a Christian' (Sicherman 1990: 4, quoting the Amoti interview). Shortly after writing The River Between in 1961 (originally titled The Black Messiah), Ngugi wrote an article for the Kenyan newspaper *Sunday Nation* with the propitiatory title of *Let Us Be Careful About What We Take From The Past*. The article argues:

...for selective retention of things from the past in keeping with "our progress to a higher and fuller humanity" [and] finds the Gikuyu "the worst offenders," citing "brutal" female circumcision and bride price as customs that have "completely outlived" their purposes. (Sicherman, 1989: 11)

He married Nyambura in 1961.

It is perhaps not surprising that The River Between reflects Ngugi's ideological unease in relation to the subaltern woman. On one level, the text reinforces the production of woman in:

terms of traditionalist ideology. For example, the free indirect discourse attributed to Chege reveals the social importance with which clitoridectomy is invested:

Circumcision was a central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who would ever pay cows and goats for such a girl? (37-38)

The passage is ambiguous. Firstly, it is ironic that it is precisely Chege's son (Waiyaki) who falls in love with an uncircumcised 'girl' (Nyambura). Yet Chege's thoughts prove to be prophetic: events intrude upon the young lovers' plans and prevent them from marrying according to either a Christian or a traditional custom. As prophecy, Chege's assertions are validated. As irony, they are deflated. This should point us to Ngugi's ambivalence in regard to both Gikuyu traditional and Western belief systems, which play out their confrontation in terms of the sign 'woman' (or 'girl') which can only be produced in exogamy. The exchange of women in Gikuyu culture is an exchange which cements social and political relationships between men. Circumcision therefore provides a seal on the act of exogamy - it invests 'the goods' with value³.

The narrative exposes circumcision as a cornerstone upon which the Gikuyu patriarchy is founded:

Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure, and a something that gave meaning to a man's life. End the custom and the spiritual basis of the tribe's cohesion and integration would be no more. The cry was up. Gikuyu Karinga. Keep the tribe pure. Tutikwenda Irigu [we do not want uncircumcized girls]. It was a soul's cry, a soul's wish. (68, my emphasis)

It is the narrative's emphasis on the 'spiritual' importance of circumcision which obscures its material importance in disciplining the Gikuyu indigene:

The knife produced a thin sharp pain as it cut through the flesh. The surgeon had done his work. Blood trickled freely onto the ground, sinking into the soil. Henceforth a religious bond linked Waiyaki to the earth, as if his blood was an offering. Around him women were shouting and praising him. The son of Chege had proved himself. Such praises were only lavished on the brave. (45)

Although this passage refers to Waiyaki's 'link to the land', the rite of circumcision bonds the female subject to the land in a similar fashion. The blood which drops onto the earth during circumcision is supposed by the Gikuyu subject to naturalize her bond with the land. This representation obfuscates the fact that circumcision functions to acculturate the Gikuyu subject and to appropriate her body in the service of oppressive social relations. The ritual re-enacts this silence inasmuch as the subject is expected not to register pain.

The material basis of circumcision becomes manifest if one examines these silences in Ngugi's text. If the ritual serves to naturalize the relationship between the subject and the land, it may be viewed as a legitimizing enactment of Gikuyu proprietorship of the land. In a number of places, the text refers to a secret language of the Kenyan highlands; a language which the colonizer does not understand. The content of this secret language is not explicitly revealed to the reader, but it forms part of a coded reference to Gikuyu proprietorship of the land at one point in the narrative:

On sunny days the green leaves and the virgin gaiety of the flowers made your heart swell with expectation. At such times the women could be seen cultivating; no, not cultivating, but talking in a secret language with the crops and the soil. Women sang gay songs. (79)

The secret language of this passage is one which links the subaltern woman with the land and that which issues from it - the flowers have a 'virgin gaiety' (which might, in turn, imply the pristine agrarian society prior to the advent of colonialism), and the women sing 'gay' songs. Equally, in the Kenya of the

early Thirties, the secret language of the KCA's involvement in the circumcision debate was that the preservation of the ritual formed part of its program for the reclamation of land alienated from the Gikuyu, and the reinstitution of a traditional social order which was beginning to lapse under the weight of colonial incursion.

Circumcision in Gikuyu culture also entails male proprietorship of women:

The initiates take a three months holiday after the ceremony, visiting friends and relatives, eating, sleeping and spending the days in the sun. During this period, they are regarded as inanimate beings without sex, and are not called "he" or "she" but "it". But when they emerge from this state of metamorphosis they are new people with a new outlook, personality and responsibilities...[A man] is now the protector of every female against all dangers irrespective of the odds against him or of whether she is personally known to him or not. (Gicarú, 1958: 117-118)

Circumcision is thus theorizable in terms of Cixous' category of the Selfsame (*le Propre*) - implying propriety, property, properness, proprietorship, proper-ing. The ritual supposedly purifies and unites the Gikuyu collective by removing the source of impurity/impropriety (the clitoris/foreskin) and institutes male prerogatives and a sexual differential between gendered subjects. It also institutes what might be loosely-termed politico-juridico-economic relations, which reinforce male privilege in - and female exclusion from - the mechanisms which constitute the Symbolic Order.

This is expressed in one of the Gikuyu myths which appears more than once in Ngũgĩ's work. Waiyaki asks why antelope do not flee from women. Chege replies:

'You do not know this! Long ago women used to rule this land and its men. They were harsh and men began to resent their hard hand. So when all the women were pregnant, men came together and overthrew them. Before this, women owned everything. The animal you saw was

their goat. But because the women could not manage them, the goats ran away. They knew women to be weak. So why should they fear them?' It was then Waiyaki understood why his mother owned nothing. (15)

This passage naturalizes Gikuyu male privilege and prerogatives in Ngugi's text and in the traditional society from which the myth is drawn. The implication in the myth is that society is best ruled by those (men) who can best instil fear into (their) others. More importantly, the myth may be linked to the rite of circumcision in this way: if clitoridectomy (symbolic or real) is the pre-requisite of a patriarchal construction of woman in terms of a uterine social organization - under which woman's excessive desire is effaced so that the womb may be appropriated for its reproductive potential - then the myth depicts the rise of the patriarchy by an appropriation of women's reproductive capacities. The myth comprises a symbolic effacement of the clitoris, and it undergirds a patriarchal Symbolic which is predicated on the effacement of female sexuality. The myth thus serves to legitimate the practice of clitoridectomy and its cultural effects. Further, it serves to counter the peasant woman's claim to political self-representation. It might thus be read in terms of Catherine Clement's observation:

[Somewhere] every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember today. (1986: 6)

If myth is read symptomatically rather than sympathetically, it begins to reveal the hierarchical relations which it upholds in Ngugi's text.

However, my reading of The River Between has not so far taken into account the contradictory status of the characters which are a synthesis or middle ground in the ideological divide between western Christianity and Gikuyu traditionalism. These characters are hybrid and are therefore offered a revolutionary potential in the text. It is clear that the text privileges these

characters: the title, The River Between, refers to the Honia river, which serves as an ideological between, a negotiated position in the conflict between the Makuyu and Kameno ridges. Perhaps the most important of these hybrid figures is Muthoni. Her decision to be both Christian and circumcized is revolutionary in the context of the circumcision debate, and it is her justification of this decision which provides Waiyaki with the first inklings of how he may assist in the liberation of the Gikuyu from colonial rule:

'I want to be a woman. Father and Mother are circumcised. But why are they stopping me, why do they deny me this? How could I be outside the tribe when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me?' (44)

Muthoni's position exposes the inconsistency of her father, Joshua's, prohibition of circumcision. However, although her position offers her a revolutionary potential in the text, it does not offer her liberation from the strictures of the patriarchal order:

'I want to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe; a husband for my bed; children to play around the hearth.' (44)

It is clear that to be 'made beautiful in the tribe' is to acquire an ideologically-determined beauty which supports the patriarchal organization of the Gikuyu. Muthoni's hybrid status is further confirmed by her final words:

'I am still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe. Look. I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe...Waiyaki,' she turned to him, 'tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe...' (53)

Nevertheless, Muthoni's death functions to negate the possibilities which the text affords her - she constitutes a failed attempt at ideological synthesis of the Gikuyu traditionalist and Christian stances in relation to

clitoridectomy. Significantly, the injuries she sustains during the operation can neither be cured by Gikuyu traditional remedies, nor by western medicine (50). Incidentally, Muthoni's death signals another negated possibility in the text. In Gikuyu, Muthoni means 'a relative by marriage', and the reader later discovers that a marriage between Waiyaki and Nyambura is fated not to take place.

The second character who is hybrid is Waiyaki. He is referred to as the 'Black Messiah', and there is some suggestion that Waiyaki is the Jesus that Muthoni has seen (103). He is described in terms which evoke both Gikuyu traditionalist and Christian discourses:

...[His] voice was like the voice of his father - no - it was like the voice of the great Gikuyus of old. Here again was a saviour, the one whose words touched the souls of the people. People listened and their hearts moved with the vibration of his voice. And he, like a shepherd speaking to his flock, avoided any words that might be insulting. (96)

Equally, Nyambura, Muthoni's sister and Waiyaki's lover is offered a revolutionary position. She is Christian and uncircumcized, and therefore outcast or unclean according to the Kiama. She defies Joshua's order not to love Waiyaki (134) and when Waiyaki comes to warn Joshua and his followers of the Kiama's plans to harm them, Nyambura does the unthinkable by declaring her love for him:

Joshua was fierce. He hated the young man with a hatred which a man of God has towards Satan. There was another murmur in the room. Then silence reigned as Nyambura walked across towards Waiyaki while all the eyes watched her. Waiyaki and Joshua must have been struck by her grace and mature youthfulness. She held Waiyaki's hand and said what no other girl at that time would have dared to say, what she herself could not have done a few days before.
'You are brave and I love you.' (136)

Nyambura's voice at this point becomes a powerful instrument for

dissembling the hardened ideological positions which contribute to the crisis in the text. However, her voice is never permitted to exert any influence upon the action. Like Waiyaki, Nyambura becomes a sacrificial victim of the Kiama; the scapegoat on to whom all of the community's guilt and hatred are transferred.

If hybrid characters such as Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni are privileged in the text, one might wonder why their ostensibly revolutionary potential is negated: why do they fall foul of circumstance or of self-interested powermongers such as Kabonyi? Significantly, Kabonyi is the archetypal villain, and, rather than attempting to achieve a synthesis of the two ideological poles posited in the novel, he fluctuates between them, first as a Christian convert and later as the leader of the Kiama. The answer to my question has less to do with Ngugi's contradictory formation under Christian and Gikuyu discourses than it has to do with his contradictory position within the emergent educated élite in post-independence Kenya.

These latter contradictions are outlined in Ian Glenn's *Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Dilemmas of the Intellectual Élite in Africa: a sociological perspective* (English in Africa, 8(2) September 1981). He adopts a Goldmannian approach in his reading of Ngugi's fiction and emphasizes Ngugi's class position within post-independence Kenya. Glenn lists four features which characterize the emergent intellectual élite in newly independent states.

Firstly, the intellectual élite plays a mediating rôle between the colonized's traditional culture and Western culture. Secondly, it has an exaggerated sense of its own importance and representativeness in the shaping of the nation state and its ideology.

The third notable feature of intellectual élites is that they are especially likely, by virtue of their training, outlook and position, to stress intellectual and abstract solutions to social and political problems...The fourth feature of the intellectual élite is that a member is a member, paradoxically, by

having his [sic] own views, opinions, conscience, judgement. He is likely to clash with traditional religious belief, marriage practices and value systems. This stress on individualism offers the temptation of a life of private consciousness, but in view of the élite's sense of idealism and of its own importance, this temptation will be resisted or take particular forms. The two most important exceptions are the pursuit of a separate religious goal or destiny for the transcendent self, or the exaltation of the self in the most individualistic of relationships, that of romantic love, with its insistence on the signs of a unique and individual attraction. (Glenn, 1981: 62)⁴

Waiyaki exhibits all of these features. 'He is initiated into Gikuyu customs by his father and by undergoing circumcision. He also receives an education at the Siriana mission school. He sees himself as a visionary who has been chosen to redeem the community from the conditions of its oppression, and the wistful solution Waiyaki offers to these conditions is that of education. Further, it is precisely Waiyaki's ambition to enter into a companionable marriage with Nyambura which marks his position as a half-outsider in relation to the Makuyu and Kameno communities. If Waiyaki does share with Ngugi the features which characterize the intellectual élite, one might expect the narrative to offer him in a considerably sympathetic light. Why then is Waiyaki abandoned to the discipline of the Kiama by the conclusion of the novel? Why is there a strong suggestion that his lover, Nyambura, will be circumcized or immolated? The unexpected turn of events at the conclusion may be explained by Ian Glenn's remark:

Clearly the situation and dilemma of the heroes [of Ngugi's novels] is structurally related to that of the élite whose alienation is, paradoxically, their source of power. How are we to understand the persistent failure and sacrifice of the hero? Is it a resurgence in African writing of the colonial novelist's theme of the tragedy of the educated African, the man of two worlds? In some sense, yes, it seems to me that the novels reflect the strain of this mediating position, this double alienation, and exonerate the hero by suggesting that the task of modernising his primordial attachments or satisfying the various allegiances is impossible, that the contradictions cannot be lived out. At the same time, in death as sacrifice, the

élite finds an ideal individualist gesture and intellectual act through which the opposites may be reconciled. (1981: 63)

Although the two central female characters in The River Between are not explicitly demarcated as intellectual figures, it is clear that they respectively represent two poles of hybridity in the narrative: Muthoni is clitoridectomized and Christian, while Nyambura is uncircumcized and in love with a circumcized Gikuyu man. This construction offers each of the sisters a reconciliatory potential in the narrative, and yet this potential is negated by Muthoni's death and Nyambura's uncertain fate. I would suggest, in agreement with Glenn's critical position, that The River Between plays out the possibilities and failures of an intellectual consciousness attempting to be representative of an emergent nationalism.

Ngugi's re-inscription of the myth of Waiyaki supports this latter contention. The 'real'/'historical' Waiyaki entered into a treaty with Lord Lugard, then later initiated resistance against the British. He was captured and killed (allegedly by being buried upside down while still alive). Nationalist historians depict Waiyaki as an early Gikuyu martyr and a forerunner of nationalist resistance to colonial domination. Mbugua Njama's pamphlet (in Sicherman, 1990: 350-355), which Ngugi translated into English, is a representative example. However, Cora Ann Presley labels Waiyaki 'an early collaborator' (1992: 9). More importantly, she notes:

Kikuyu oral tradition maintains that Waiyaki was an ambitious young man from a poor lineage who believed he could become a man of status, wealth and authority by working with the Europeans. (1992: 63n)

I would not like to argue for either the educated nationalist élite's, or the illiterate peasantry's, representations of Waiyaki. Rather, I would read the differences between the two versions as an allegory of the crisis of representativeness which confronts Ngugi as an African intellectual, removed from his

constituent class by an education which is as disabling in political terms as it is enabling in socio-economic terms. Of course, the Waiyaki of The River Between is not the unqualified hero/martyr of nationalist accounts, but he is always partially inscribed by the Waiyaki of myth. This may be seen in the passage which relates the Second Birth:

The women went on shouting but Waiyaki did not see them now. Their voices were a distant buzz like another he had heard in a dream when a swarm of bees came to attack him. (12)

Two points are important here. Firstly, the dream of the bees is a proleptic moment in the narrative; it prefigures the immolation of Waiyaki and Nyambura and thus enhances the suggestion that Waiyaki is a prophet chosen by the Gikuyu gods to lead his people. Secondly, it also resonates with a moment of divine intervention in the myth of Waiyaki. Waiyaki has been captured and is being taken to the coast by British soldiers. A group of warriors is following them in order to free Waiyaki by force:

It is very significant that there were many guards with him, and when they were travelling...near Kabete a beehive, which no one had touched, fell from a tree, and the bees burst out and attacked the people who were guarding Waiyaki. The warriors wanted to fight; now they were being helped by the bees. (Mbugua Njama, quoted in Sicherman, 1990: 352)

There is an obvious difference in the function of the bees in the two stories. In the myth, they protect Waiyaki. In the novel, they attack him. Ngugi's novel reinscribes the myth in order to act out the idealistic scenario of the individual sacrifice/martyrdom of the hero. It is a gesture which reconciles Ngugi's position with that of the illiterate peasantry (as Ian Glenn suggests) and it accords with Ngugi's Christian worldview at the time of writing - the sacrificial victim/messiah reunites the collective.

There is another disparity in the Second Birth passage:

His mother sat near the fireplace in her hut as if in labour. Waiyaki sat between her thighs. A thin cord taken from a slaughtered goat and tied to his mother represented the umbilical cord. A woman, old enough to be a midwife, came and cut the cord. (12)

[The] gut is cut in a long ribbon, and while the initiates stand in one group close together the ribbon encircles them, being tied so as to cover the navel of those on the outside of the circle. They stand in position for a few minutes; then the midwife comes along with a razor dipped in sheep's blood and cuts the ribbon in two. This symbolizes the cutting of the umbilical cord at birth. This is done to express the rebirth of the initiate. (Kenyatta, 1968: 150)

Ngugi reinscribes the Second Birth in two ways. Firstly, it takes place before Waiyaki's circumcision, rather than afterward (as in Kenyatta's account). Secondly, Ngugi's account deals - revealingly - with an individual, rather than with a collective. Ngugi's text is marked by an individualism (which, in turn, evidences a self-interested account of Gikuyu culture and resistance). Further, it points to Ngugi's version of Kenyan history as a history of individuals, heroes, martyrs. Interestingly, however, Ngugi's intervention does not distantiate itself significantly from the patriarchal structuring of Gikuyu society, which the Second Birth represents, and to which that rite contributes. Both passages might be read by Cixous as analogues of the breaking of the child's Imaginary relation to its mother's body when it enters culture (it is reborn as a subject of language once it learns the Name-of-the-Father). Spivak would read the passages in a different, but related way, as cultural events (events which revive culture even as they emerge out of it) which inscribe the uterine social organization of a male Symbolic structured by clitoridectomy. Circumcision founds the age-sets - the initiates are bound by virtue of being born at the same time - which in turn organize Gikuyu society. The 'umbilical cord' is the by-product of men's labour (tending to cattle, sheep and goats) which indicates the pride-of-place afforded to male 'labour' in the Symbolic Order:

The double vision that would affirm feminism as well

as undo sexism suspects a pre-comprehended move before the reproductive coupling of man and woman, before the closing of the circle whose only excess is the child [who will, in time, be named by the father's name], and whose "outside" is the man's "active" life in society. (1987: 151, emphasis in the original)

Circumcision and the rebirth of the initiates are pre-requisites for marriage in Gikuyu culture, and the patriarchal agenda is made explicit in the rites. 'Woman' (the midwife) is situated outside of culture. Her razor, dipped in blood, is the mark of an effacement (the effaced clitoris), and as such, indicates her lack of the (diminutive) phallus. Paradoxically, the razor also inscribes her as the alternative to woman-as-lack. This alternative is the fetishized woman-with-the-phallus (woman with the object on which the Selfsame fixates - woman as womb and/or woman as breast - woman as reproductive and nurturing agency). In both scenarios, she is woman without desire and woman without a voice. She is recuperable into the dialectic of desire staged by the Selfsame.

Tobe Levin's essay, *Women as Scapegoats of Culture and Cult: an activist's view of Ngugi's The River Between*, contains an insightful analysis of the novel and of the socio-cultural basis for clitoridectomy. Levin highlights Ngugi's ironic juxtaposition of traditional Gikuyu and Christian religious belief:

Christianity's failure is perhaps of far greater concern to the author than the obviously reactionary stance of the Kiama...One needs little maturity to doubt the credibility of an organization condemning clitoridectomy but espousing belief in a virgin birth. In fact, concerning sexual matters, the tribe appears to be infinitely more sophisticated than the Christians. For example, the clitoris is at least acknowledged by the former (being too powerful, it is removed), while the organ has been treated by western ideology as though it didn't exist. (1986: 214)

Levin also draws on Marielouise Janssen-Jureit's useful observation that clitoridectomy serves to produce docile wives. The ritual enables Gikuyu culture to appropriate the female

desire which threatens to introduce social disorder. Equally, in the Kenya of 1929, the female body is appropriated for the production of manpower, which the post-colonial state in embryo requires in order to be born. In terms of this dynamic, Gikuyu women's bodies are the baby-factories which service culture. They labour without pleasure, and are therefore implicitly in a state of serfdom. We will see resonances of this appropriation in Ngugi's subsequent novel, A Grain of Wheat. At the conclusion of the novel, Gikonyo envisages a pregnant Mumbi. In Gikuyu mythology, Mumbi is the mother of the Gikuyu community, and Mumbi the character's pregnancy presages the birth of a new Kenya. Thus, Mumbi is situated on either side of the present and is therefore excluded from history. She only achieves presence once she has been inseminated by her male counterpart.

If we wish to interrogate Ngugi's production of woman as a sign, we may trace many of his later heroines back to the production of women in the circumcision debate. Gikuyu nationalism took shape around the issue of clitoridectomy. At this juncture in Kenyan history, the Gikuyu woman's body became a metaphor for the social composition of the state. To be uncircumcized was to uphold the Christological-colonialist establishment and to be clitoridectomized was to support the institution of an independent Kenya, purified of colonial influences and controlled and peopled by Africans. The rôle of Gikuyu women in the debate was productive inasmuch as they helped to initiate the resistance which would later topple the colonial order, but it was a rôle which has proved to be expensive in retrospect. Immediately after independence, Kenyatta's first legislative act was to abolish the prohibition on clitoridectomy. Levin comments on the increasing prevalence of the operation in latter-day Kenya. She remarks that there has been:

an accelerating neglect of the rite accompanied by the spread of excision performed in hospitals on girls at increasingly younger ages, for whom the amputation is totally divorced from any kind of moral, ethical or even sex-educational dimension. The death of 14 young girls in 1983 led to the passage of an edict against

the operations in Kenya. At the same time, law without the force of custom remains impotent... (1986: 216)

Levin's claims are supported by the statistics in one available study of clitoridectomy in Kenya, which claims that 4.74 million of the 7.9 million women in Kenya in 1985 had undergone clitoridectomy - a figure of roughly 60 percent (Kouba and Muasher, 1985: 99).

It would appear that the Kenyan patriarchy is producing docile women as effectively as it ever has. The only difference between the Kenya of today and the Kenya of the thirties is that the patriarch now has western medical technology at his disposal. I am not claiming that Ngugi shares complicity in these atrocities, but rather that his consistent, sentimental and idealistic equation of the female character's body with the body of the state contains problematic implications for Kenyan women, and does not afford them the emancipation it promises.

Regarding gender-political solutions for Gikuyu women, I share Spivak's suspicion of the unqualified use of French (Euro-) Feminism in a 'third-world' context:

I am suggesting, then, that a *deliberate* application of the doctrines of French High "Feminism" to a different situation of political specificity might misfire. If, however, International Feminism is defined within a Western European context, the heterogeneity becomes manageable. (*French Feminism in an International Frame*, 1987: 141)

However, I also share her sense of the usefulness of Cixous' theories as an instrument for the analysis and interdiction of patriarchy:

In the long run, the most useful thing that a training in French feminism can give us is politicized and critical examples of "Symptomatic reading" not always following the reversal-displacement technique of a deconstructive reading. The method that seemed recuperative when used to applaud the avant-garde is productively conflictual when used to oppose the

ruling discourse. (Spivak, 1987: 149)

In practical terms, Cixous' notions of *writing the body* or *coming to writing* are something of an impossibility, given the widespread occurrence of clitoridectomy and an illiteracy rate of between 70% and 80% among the female population (Robinson, 1981: 78-79. The percentages are dated (1980), and are computed from source data to include the gender differential). Paradoxically, Cixous' related formulation of a viable bisexuality for women might hold very threatening consequences for the patriarchal order in a society in which homosexuality is almost unknown (cf. Kenyatta, 1968: 162)⁵.

Chapter 4

Re-memembering Mau Mau: Those Things That Never Were

This chapter examines the colonial and bourgeois nationalist/traditionalist constructions of Mau Mau. An understanding of the narrativization of Mau Mau is crucial to an understanding of Ngugi's political, class and gender interests in his representations of the Kenyan insurgency. It should be made clear that I will not be offering a history of the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army, but a history of Mau Mau. This distinction will be vital to my readings of Kenyan history and of the Ngugi's historiography. There never was a Mau Mau (I omit italics to denote 'Mau Mau' as part of a truth-claim). The term itself is a product of colonial or Gikuyu nationalist discourses and was (apparently) never used by the peasant insurgents. David Maughan Brown writes:

'Discourse,' said White...'*constitutes* the objects which it pretends only to describe realistically and to analyse objectively.' An armed peasants' revolt took place in Kenya after the Declaration of Emergency in October 1952. Those who participated had attempted to forge political unity through the collective act of swearing the Oath of Unity, and the leadership gave political definition to the aims of the movement by naming it the 'Land and Freedom Army'. 'Mau Mau', on the other hand, with its central connotations of 'primitivism'/'*atavism*', bestiality, witchcraft and cannibalism, was *constituted* by, and existed only in, colonial discourse. In the process of that constitution of 'Mau Mau', 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' were indistinguishable. (1985: 260, Maughan Brown's emphasis)

Mau Mau lends itself to my analysis because its production in discourse signals the settlers' attempts to produce the limits of a dominant colonial subjectivity by producing an other. These attempts were ultimately deconstructive, and led directly to Kenyan independence, despite the fact that 'Mau Mau' skirmishes were insignificant, relative to the colonial military, propagandist, epistemological and metaphysical onslaught which

was directed against the Gikuyu.

Originary Etymologies of Mau Mau

Significantly, *Mau Mau* falls outside of any traditionalist discourse. It is an example of linguistic misprision, although the origins of this misprision are disputed and indefinite. Barnett and Njama offer the following explanations as possible origins of the settlers' usage of the term:

Some suggest that it 'really' meant *Uma Uma* (Out, Out), referring to the African desire that Europeans leave Kenya, and was arrived at through a traditional children's game wherein the sounds of common words were transposed as in our own Pig-Latin. A few informants have suggested that one of the defendants at the Naivasha Trial used the expression 'mumumumu' when referring to the whispered voices within the darkened oath-taking hut and that European journalists' present thought he had said 'Mau Mau'. (1970: 53)

Barnett and Njama continue to cite other possible etymologies of *Mau Mau*. It might derive from an African detainee who told a policeman that he had been given a 'Muma' (an oath)¹, or that 'Mau Mau' is a little-used term meaning 'greedy', which is sometimes used to designate gluttony among children and was extrapolated to refer to oath-administrators as corrupt elders, because they were primarily interested in receiving the oath-taking initiation fee and feasting on a goat (1970: 53-54). Other sources attribute the latter derivation to a loyalist preacher (or, shopkeeper, according to Rosberg and Nottingham, 1966: 332), Parmenas Kiritu, who denounced the movement as a 'mau mau' or 'childish thing' (Kariuki, 1975: 24; Edgerton, 1989: 59).

Credo Mutwa offers a more fanciful interpretation which, incidentally, is informed by Mutwa's own Zulu traditionalist (and, in the context of the South African struggle, reactionary) claims in My People:

A white farmer shot a wild cat which had been stealing his fowls. He threw the carcass at the feet of his Kikuyu servant and jokingly told him to eat it. This wild cat turned out to be the most important chicken thief in human history. Its life was traded for 26,000 human lives, vast cuts in a great nation's budget, and indescribable memories printed on the minds of orphans who saw their parents butchered. The unrest was there already, and so were the agitators, who exaggerated this farmer's small but thoughtless action, making it seem intentional - a deliberate sacrilege. The wild cat is sacred to the Kikuyu, and the sound it made when it died was 'Mau Mau'. (1977: 175)

Sicherman lists other, equally tenuous, etymologies. She cites Johnstone Muthiora's explanation of the first appearance in print of *Mau Mau*:

One of the men on trial [at Naivasha]...refused to describe "those things" that had occurred during a secret initiation ceremony. Asked to explain what he meant by the phrase, he replied in English, "Just those - those things I was told never to tell"; in response to a request for a translation in Gikuyu, he said: "*Maundu mau mau nderiruo ndi koigi*." ...Muthiora explains: "*Mau Mau* is an expression which Kikuyus use very commonly to refer to objects or ideas whose names are unknown or forgotten...very much as the English use *thingamajig*." (1990: 214-215)

Barnett and Njama offer:

...a secondary meaning of the term '*Mau Mau*', invented after the name had already become established. Here, the initials of the name are intended to stand for the Swahili words *Mzungu Arudi Uingereza, Mwafrica Apate Uhuru*, meaning, 'Let the European return to England and the African obtain his freedom'. (1966: 53)

Sicherman contributes further possible etymologies:

Other, more far-fetched theories propose that the letters, reversed, stood for "Underground African Movement" or that "Mau" was "in honor of Mao Tse-Tung," who came into power a year after the term first appeared...Still another theory derives it from the Mau Forest in the Maasai area from which the Olenguruone settlers were originally moved. (1990:

215)

All of the explanations offered for the origins of Mau Mau point to its symbolic indeterminacy. The term, like the peasant revolutionaries it described, could not be made to fit into any received Gikuyu traditional linguistic code.

Rather, the etymologies ascribed to Mau Mau point towards the efforts of both colonial and African historians to appropriate the term for either the colonial or Gikuyu nationalist constructions of the insurgency. These historians attempt to produce the Mau Mau insurgent as an homogenous historical subjectivity. As such, the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army, with its heterogenous - and at times, divided or discontinuous - membership, aims and strategies, is always recuperated in terms of a colonial or nationalist narrative. The proper name, 'Mau Mau', is a site of contested desires and interests in the colonial social matrix. It is a term whose paleontology - which Spivak glosses as 'the charge which words carry on their shoulders' (Harasym, 1990: 25) - overwhelmingly locates and narrates the historian who uses it. Gayatri Spivak's comments on historiography are useful:

The production of historical accounts is the discursive narrativization of events. When historiography is self-consciously "non-theoretical," it sees its task, with respect to rival historical accounts of the same period, as bringing forth "what really happened" in a value-neutral prose. Since the incursion of "theory" into the discipline of history, and the uncomfortable advent of Michel Foucault, it is no longer too avant-garde to suspect or admit that "events" are never not discursively constituted and that the language of historiography is also always language. (1987: 241-242)

Against the positivist histories of Mau Mau, I will offer a subaltern historiography of Mau Mau, in order to demonstrate that Ngugi's writing of history adopts both colonial and bourgeois nationalist discourses around Mau Mau. In *Subaltern Studies: deconstructing historiography*, Spivak states that subaltern

historiography consists in revising the historical perspective:

...by proposing at least two things: first that the moment(s) of change be pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transition (they would thus be seen in relation to histories of domination and exploitation rather than within the great modes-of-production narrative) and, secondly, that such changes are signalled or marked by a functional change in sign-systems. The most important functional change is from the religious to the militant...[and the] most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is that the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the "subaltern." (1987: 197)

Spivak contends that a positive subaltern consciousness can never be retrieved by the historian, because it is '...subject to the cathexis of the élite...[and] is effaced even as it is disclosed' (1987: 203). Paradoxically, when the subaltern historian acknowledges that the subaltern is produced as an historical subject (or more precisely, *subject-effect*) under a multitude of heterogenous determinations, and that any historiography which takes the subaltern as its object must deny that it is investigating an originary or sovereign consciousness, then the object of knowledge:

...can be no more than a theoretical fiction to entitle the project of reading. (1987: 204)

Thus, subaltern historiography becomes a site of strategic intervention which subverts the power/knowledge relations inherent in the academy. Spivak continues:

What good does such a re-inscription do? It acknowledges that the arena of the subaltern's persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogenous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian. The historian must persist in his efforts in this awareness, that the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic...Theoretical descriptions cannot produce universals. They can only ever produce provisional generalizations, even as the theorist realizes the crucial importance of their persistent production. (1987: 207-207, emphasis in the

original)

Spivak's assertions are particularly useful to my analysis of Mau Mau. We have seen that the term itself is a site of production, and any attempt to provide an etymology (or undifferentiated origin) for 'Mau Mau' must betray the ideological interlocution of the historian/linguist.

I will not be attempting to recover the voices or consciousnesses of the insurgents who *named themselves* the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army (amongst other names). Rather, I will be focusing on the ideological framing of the insurgency in representation. This re-presentation is most obvious in the usage 'Mau Mau'. All accounts of Mau Mau are mythical; the only gradation or difference between them resides in the ideological interests they serve. Paradoxically, this offers a productive site for my own critical intervention in the contesting narrativizations of 'Mau Mau' history: if the term is purely fictional, any historical or critical reading of the insurgency is necessarily unstable. Once the critic acknowledges that his/her interlocution can never be more than a construct, then the claim to objective - and therefore transparent - analysis may be abandoned, even though the strategic importance of analysis is paramount.

Narratives and Representations of Mau Mau

As a broad generalization, colonial accounts of the Kenyan insurgency fall into two categories: Mau Mau's origins may be linked with the innate violence, barbarism and backwardness of the African (Mau Mau as a child of iniquity) or Mau Mau has its origins in oppressive economic and social conditions (Mau Mau as a child of inequity). The former category is complicit with the Imperialist project because it produces an other by subjecting it to the binary hierarchies which found a metaphysics. Here, the confrontation between settler and insurgent is staged as the eternal battle between the forces of light and darkness, good and

evil, right and wrong, the Law and deviance. The second category is complicit with the Imperialist project in a more subtle way. It implies that the colonized is merely dissatisfied with the hardships he/she endures under the colonial system of enforced wage-labour and land alienation, and that he/she might be appeased by a policy of co-option. The former category posits a policy of eradication - the rooting out of difference - and the latter posits the assimilation of difference into the category of the Same. As such, colonial historians have produced representations of the insurgent in which the historian's political interest works to stage an other (*Mau Mau*) which consolidates the West as the sovereign subject of History. Spivak has said:

To an extent, I think the post-structuralist project would look at history not as a series of brute facts but as narratives generated in one way or another. Derrida has a statement where he says that deconstruction is the deconstitution of the founding concepts of the Western historical narrative...
 [Our] view of history is a very different view. It is also cumulative, but it's a view where we see the way in which narratives compete with each other, which one rises, which one falls, who is silent, and the itinerary of the silencing rather than the retrieval.
 (Harasym, 1990: 31)

If positivist History (the elaboration of stages) is an elaborate staging of events, then subaltern historiography consists in a laboured upstaging of History's founding moment.

In order to elicit the crises in the colonial confrontation with *Mau Mau*, I will begin by examining a few passages from colonial histories of the period. I will highlight sections of the texts which will inform my reading of Ngugi's representations of *Mau Mau*. Equally, my own object-choices or interventions will be made explicit:

The guarantee of loyalty to the society was an oath, administered to the accompaniment of **barbaric symbolic rites**, which terrified the participants with **memories of ancient superstitions** reinforced by present threats of *Mau Mau* vengeance. As a demonstration of the **power behind** the leaders of the movement, all those who

dared to resist Mau Mau **agents** were tortured, murdered and mutilated in the most savage manner that these **devils could devise**. (Wilson, 1954: 52)

In this passage, the construction of *Mau Mau* reveals the crisis of meaning which confronts any historian who tries to present a knowledge of that which never was. Here *Mau Mau* is the repository of an alien symbology, an anti-knowledge, which returns (in the form of a memory which colonial domination was supposed to have obliterated) to terrify the oath-takers. The insurgents emerge as agents whose actions are articulated by a 'power behind'; a nameless diabolical multitude ('devils') who devise this anti-knowledge.

Where does this anti-knowledge originate? It originates in the black body as a site of knowledge, and therefore, of desire (the other-side of knowledge). Peter Brooks states:

...signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body. (1993: 3)

The colonial narration of *Mau Mau* is an interlocution on silence ('*Mau Mau*' is a linguistic and 'historical' vacuity - every narrative of *Mau Mau* is an 'authorized' version) which consists in narrativizing blackness. Colonial representations of *Mau Mau* rely upon imageries of atavism, bestial sexuality and occultism, and inscribe the black body with desire, in order to recuperate (the Land and Freedom Army's) politically-motivated dissent for the broader historical narrative of Imperialism. Racist constructions of *Mau Mau* compensate for the Land and Freedom Army's rupturing of this historical narrative. Robert Young, commenting on the history of biologicistic constructions of racism, is apposite in this regard:

It has often been suggested that there are intrinsic links between racism and sexuality. What has not been emphasized is that the debates about theories of race in the nineteenth century, by settling on the possibility or impossibility of hybridity, focused

explicitly on the issue of sexual unions between whites and blacks. Theories of race were thus also covert theories of desire. (1995: 9)

Wilson, a colonial historian of Mau Mau, draws directly upon biologicistic 'theories' of race in his chapter 'The African is Different' (1954: 30-35).

The discourses of sexuality in the following passages point to the colonizer's confrontation with Mau Mau as an encounter that is played out in terms of a dialectic of desire:

Suggestion can kill a man, either through sheer terror or hysterical hyper-tension. The African has, for thousands of years, been **ruled by the force of suggestion operated by cruel and sadistic minds**. This has been one of the great curses of Africa and one of the main reasons why civilization never emerged in that continent's past. There is nothing in this world which better deserves the application of the term 'satanic' than the **use of malevolent suggestion**. It was this, and the fear of vengeance should it be broken, which gave the Mau Mau oath **its enormous potency**. This is something new in the history of political movements; in the name of liberty there emerged from Africa's dark and terrible past a **concatenation of abject superstition, fear, malevolent suggestion, barbaric ritual and the frenzy of blood lust** which have **erupted** with vengeful fury against the materialistic enlightenment of the European. (Rawcliffe, 1954: 52)

The **climax came with the horror** of the Lari massacre, when a number of villages were attacked simultaneously one night by some hundreds of **insanely blood-thirsty devils...** (Wilson, 1954: 56)

What is interesting in these passages is that the Gikuyu (or 'Kuke', in settler terminology), is not an agent in his/her own right. The peasant is either subject to the 'malevolent suggestion' of shady *opérateurs* or is an irrational ('insanely blood-thirsty') cannibal. Of course, these myths contribute to a broader opinion espoused by both authors - that the African is not suitably evolved for self-government. Paradoxically, it is with the African leadership of the KCA that both authors lay the

blame for *Mau Mau* - Kenyatta is represented in both texts as an evil mastermind (or Faustian intelligence) who is as damned as he is exceptional for not conforming to the stereotype of the backward African. This representation of Kenyatta re-emerges in Corfield's *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau* (the 'Corfield Report'). Corfield refers to Kenyatta as 'the architect of Mau Mau' (Corfield, 1960: 219; quoted in Rosberg and Nottingham, 1966: 378f.) and claims that Kenyatta:

...was able to blend the technique of revolution, undoubtedly learnt while he was in Russia, with an appeal to superstition...In this way, *Mau Mau* gradually but inexorably assumed the character of a tribal religion, albeit a religion based on evil, which bore **a remarkable resemblance to the witchcraft and black magic practised in Europe in the Middle Ages.** (Corfield, 1960: 52; quoted in Rosberg and Nottingham, 1966: 378f, italics in the original)

It is this semblance between *Mau Mau* and an episode in European history which I find particularly interesting. The *Mau Mau* insurgent is ascribed an identity which I will call 'the familiar devil'. This is a theoretical fiction which I will adopt to interrogate Secret Lives in an appendix to this work. 'The familiar devil' is that which disrupts or transgresses the limits of a self-consolidating or self-present settler subjectivity. It is the inevitable consequence of the colonizer's entry into a dialogue of misprision: it both evades discourse and insinuates itself in discourse, and returns to discourse to bring it to crisis.

The familiar devil is an indeterminate and unhomely semi-presence on the borders of the colonized's consciousness. It might perhaps be theorized in terms of Freud's uncanny, the return of the unconscious to language - 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and familiar' (Freud, 1955 (1919): 220). *Mau Mau* became the familiar devil because it was everywhere in evidence and nowhere to be found. This unsettled the domestic economy of the Selfsame: the 'houseboys' who had formerly been the equivalent of human pets

now assumed an ominously ambivalent status in settler households:

Then Europeans themselves were attacked. The whole world has heard the tale of these atrocities. Farmers and their wives, even little children, were hacked to death by **devils** who up to the moment of their **black treachery** had been treated as loyal and trusted friends. (Wilson, 1954: 56)

For many settlers the most horrifying aspect of these Mau Mau attacks was the active assistance of previously trusted Kikuyu servants...Anything that could turn their own servants into killers was primitive and evil. Governor Sir Philip Mitchell, who had for so long denied that Mau Mau was a threat to Kenya's stability, spoke for most settlers when he wrote that Mau Mau derived from the "**black** and blood-stained forces of **sorcery** and magic, stirring in the hearts and minds of wicked men" who represented "**dark and dreadful distortions of the human spirit**". (Edgerton, 1989: 151)

In these passages, a racist subtext is evident. Mau Mau as anti-knowledge was inexorably an African phenomenon, and it confirmed what the Imperialist had long suspected - that there lurked in the African a heart of darkness which was inscrutable and unknowable.

In response to the threat of Mau Mau as an atavistic and unpredictable insurgency, the colonial government declared an Emergency, and its strategies of detection, containment, torture and confession, and infiltration, index an attempt by the colonizer to produce a knowledge of Mau Mau, to determine Mau Mau's limits, to master it, and thereby restore the sovereign subjectivity of the colonizer as Selfsame, with the subaltern (unsexed) subjectivity as its self-consolidating other. Nevertheless, the attempt to produce or define Mau Mau could amount to no more than a misprised, or at best, fabricated, epistemology. Even in the confession room, the recalcitrance of Mau Mau suspects and Gikuyu citizens ('Kukes' were arrested indiscriminately) to provide a narrative which would substantiate the torturer's supremacist meta-narrative entailed a resistance to the colonial production of Mau Mau.

In turn, police accounts contributed to the myth of *Mau Mau* as the familiar devil:

They wouldn't say a thing, of course, and one of them, a tall coal-black bastard, kept grinning at me, real insolent. I slapped him hard but he kept right on grinning at me, so I kicked him in the balls as hard as I could. He went down in a heap but when he finally got on his feet he grinned at me again and I snapped, I really did. I stuck my revolver right in his grinning mouth and said something, I don't remember exactly what, and pulled the trigger. (Anonymous interview, quoted in Edgerton, 1989: 156)

The suspect's smile, an overfamiliar gesture, unsettles the hierarchies implicit in the theatre of torture. The interrogator 'snaps' precisely because his attempts to disrupt the suspect's familiar silence ('They wouldn't say a thing, of course') prove to be inadequate to the task. It was this inadequacy in the face of *Mau Mau* that led to some of the more bizarre torture episodes in the Kenyan emergency:

Electric shock was widely used, and so was fire. Women were choked and held under water; gun barrels, beer bottles, and even knives were thrust into their vaginas. Men had beer bottles thrust into their rectums, were dragged behind Land Rovers, whipped, burned and bayoneted. Their fingers were chopped off, and sometimes their testicles were crushed with pliers. (Edgerton, 1989: 160)

If torture is a means of writing on the body to produce a narrative, then the sexual subtext in accounts such as these betrays the crisis of potency which *Mau Mau* posed for the colonial authorities. The 'black' body which will not re-produce colonial inscriptions of it becomes a site of desire for the colonial powers.

In order to substantiate my claim that colonial discourses have consistently framed *Mau Mau* as the familiar devil, a small diversion from 'historical' subject matter is necessary. Perhaps the best place to begin looking for a received historical discourse on *Mau Mau* is in what might at first seem the least

likely of textual sources - a children's novel.

African Adventure, by Willard Price, recounts the adventures of three Americans in Africa. John Hunt is a collector of animals for European, American and South American zoos, and he permits his two teenage sons, Hal and Roger, to accompany him on his excursions. They encounter a secret society, called the Leopard Society, whose members are initiated in oath-taking ceremonies and swear to murder anyone who kills a leopard. Unfortunately, Hal kills a man-eating leopard which has been terrifying local villagers, and so the Leopard Society attempt to avenge the creature's death. At one point in the novel, *Mau Mau* is explicitly compared to the Leopard Society. Hal tells his father that it makes no sense that their tracker, Joro (a member of the Leopard Society), does not want to kill them but is attempting to do so. His father replies:

'It makes African sense. It makes Leopard Society sense. This isn't London. A couple of dozen African countries have become independent during the last few years, and they have parliaments and presidents and delegates to the United Nations, and they are making a lot of progress and we hope the best for them. But that must not blind us to the fact that outside the cities, away back in these forests, life can be as savage as it was a hundred years ago. Ninety percent of Africans have never been inside a school. Some of them blame everything on the white man. You've heard of *Mau Mau* - the secret society that makes its members promise to kill whites. It was at its worst in 1952 but popped up again in 1958, and now it has become more secret than ever and is likely to go on as long as there are white men in East Africa holding land that the blacks think should belong to them. More than twenty thousand people have been killed by this society. Most of the killers don't want to kill - the society makes them.'

'How can they make them do what they don't want to do?'

'Simple. They grab a black man and tell him that he will be tortured to death unless he takes an oath to kill whites. If he objects, they begin the torture. When he gives in, they make him take an oath to kill, and to make him remember the oath he must eat a dinner of human brains, blood, sheep's eyes and dirt.' (1963: 73-74)

Towards the end of the story, the Hunts notice Joro putting something in the food. They pretend to eat it and Joro breaks down and confesses tearfully that he has tried to poison them by adding leopard's whiskers to the stew (the whiskers supposedly pierce the stomach lining and cause cysts which lead to peritonitis and death - an assertion which is equally difficult to swallow). The Leopard Society attacks and the Hunts and their trackers are outnumbered, even though Joro has decided to assist them. Fortunately, a troop of three hundred baboons smell the skins of their enemies - leopards - and attack the Leopard Men. The Leopard Men run into one of the animal cages and Joro locks them inside. What is interesting is that the Leopard Men are equated with bestiality and are therefore easily subsumed into a narrative in which it is precisely nature, already mastered by Imperialist knowledge systems, which defeats their objectives (three hundred baboons miraculously appear on the scene). Here, the baboons (whose motives are 'natural') obscure the motives of the Imperialist: to contain and produce a discursive limit around a peasant insurgency. The suspect politics of John Hunt are therefore naturalized in the narrative.

The narrative encodes all of the features of an Imperialist discourse around *Mau Mau* - oath-taking, torture, confession, the attempt to produce a limit which would lead to the definition, detection and capture of the insurgents, the affinity between *Mau Mau* and lower forms of life, *Mau Mau* as a form of anti-knowledge². Unfortunately, I will not be able to deal with the novel in more depth in this chapter. Although there was (supposedly) a society called the Leopard Men in Sierra Leone (see Kalous, Cannibals and Tongo Players of Sierra Leone, 1974: 50-68), it is my contention that Price had *Mau Mau* in mind when he wrote African Adventure. This is evidenced in a minor episode in the novel. Roger finds a leopard cub and names it *chui*, meaning 'leopard' (1963: 97). According to Sicherman, *chui* is a Gikuyu usage (1990: 198). Incidentally, during the Emergency, the settlers' 'pet' name for the Gikuyu was *Nugu*, or baboon (Edgerton, 1989: 154, 158, 161, 163).

However, my brief analysis of this text serves another important purpose in this chapter. African Adventure was one of the novels which I read in the formative years of my interest in literature. I introduce it in order to foreground my own intervention in the myths of *Mau Mau*, and to demonstrate that some of those myths are linked with my own reading history. My reading of *Mau Mau* in Ngugi's fiction partly consists in unlearning the Imperialist narrative which introduced me to 'Mau Mau'.

What then are the traditionalist or nationalist narratives of *Mau Mau*? What interests do they serve? The majority of the accounts are written by the upper command structures of the Land and Freedom Army. For example, Karuiki was a prominent member of the KCA and Njama was Stanley Mathenge's secretary in the Abedare mountains. Further, these accounts are all produced by literate (educated), and therefore comparatively privileged, Gikuyus. The majority of the nationalist or traditionalist accounts of *Mau Mau* were produced by the leaders of the insurgency, and this contributed to the silencing of the illiterate subaltern (unsexed) subjects, who comprised the majority in the Land and Freedom Army. Kariuki's attitude towards the illiterate members of the Army is patronising:

When the officers asked who had written [the letter of complaint], I told them I had. I had forced Robinson [Mwangi] to agree with this plan because it was vital to prevent them taking both of us and leaving the illiterates like orphans with no one to look after them. (1975: 94)

Karari Njama recounts the frictions between the educated and the illiterate insurgents at a general meeting of the forest-fighters, in early 1954:

...Kimbo stood up and made more comments and, as an illiterate person, challenged the educated persons for abandoning the revolution and advocated that education not be regarded as a qualification in the election. He was opposed by 'Dr' King'ori who spoke well on behalf of the educated people. He said that without

education, without making full use of our educated people, we were heading nowhere. As a teacher I supported 'Dr' King'ori and stressed the importance of education, of both academic and cultural knowledge. (1966: 336)

The Njama and Kariuki accounts of Mau Mau are, in turn, influential in Ngugi's literophile accounts of the resistance movement. In his postscript to the 1975 edition of Kariuki's account, Ngugi hints that he had read the book as early as 1963, four years before the publication of A Grain of Wheat. In a footnote to *Mau Mau: Violence and Culture in Homecoming*, Ngugi cites both the Njama and Kariuki texts as some of the 'good' books on Mau Mau to have emerged since 1963 (1972: 30).

Nevertheless, Kariuki does mention one anecdote which supports my own contention that Mau Mau insurgents assumed the identity of (or were positioned as) the settler's familiar devil. He recounts an incident in which Mau Mau detainees were subjected to colonial propaganda, upon arrival at Langata camp:

A Kikuyu Home Guard then told us to repeat after him, 'We Englishmen will rule this country for ever'. As he was a Kikuyu this seemed an odd statement and we found no denial of our principles in repeating it...We were then told to say 'Jomo Kenyatta is a dog'...Someone had a brainwave and we passed the word round: 'Say he is a Creator (Kikuyu-*mba*) not a dog (*mbwa*-Swahili)'...We were then told to say 'Dedan Kimathi and Stanley Mathenge will be finished in the forest'...Fortunately the Swahili word for 'flourish' (*ishi*) is very similar to that of 'finish' (*isha*) so by mumbling in deep voices we managed to disguise this one easily enough... (1975: 59-60)

This account might easily be read as an example of a deconstructive approach to enforced brainwashing. In an editor's note to Derrida's Positions, Alan Bass comments on Derrida's use of homonyms: 'they contain a variety of meanings under the same acoustic signifier'. Further:

[Homonyms] inscribe *différance* within themselves: they are always different from themselves, they always defer any singular grasp of meaning. (1981: 100n)

Under threat of a beating, the (Kenyan Land and Freedom Army) detainees both reverse and displace the Imperialist sloganeering by an ingenious homophonic and heterosemic writing. They remain heterogenous to the Imperialist discourse which produces *Mau Mau*.

The Kenyan Land and Freedom Army's ability to remain heterogenous to any historical discourse which seeks to construct it raises a number of important points. Firstly, any representation which stages the KLFA as *Mau Mau* betrays a political interest, and as such, is apologistic for an homogenizing, self-consolidating discourse. I will be investigating this in Ngugi's later novels. Secondly, it is precisely in relation to this heterogenous subject matter that the subaltern historian becomes subalternized in relation to the subaltern woman as sexed subject. The Gikuyu woman's voice is not retrievable from history because she is assigned a subject position at the limit between the colonizer and *Mau Mau* during the Kenyan war for independence.

Mau Mau and 'Woman'

How then is this limit produced in colonial and nationalist texts? As regards colonial constructions of the subaltern woman's subjectivity, Presley states:

When women's activism is described in pro-colonial historiography, two portrayals of women emerge. They project women as either victims of *Mau Mau* or prostitutes who, through personal [read sexual] contact with male nationalists, were drawn to *Mau Mau* while resident in Nairobi. The view of women as victims of *Mau Mau* originates from the colonial record. Women are presented by colonial officials as physical and psychological victims of atavism...Women nationalists were relegated the role of "adoring female hangers-on". (1992: 158)

However, Presley's analysis contains two crucial omissions, in that it does not examine the treatment of the Gikuyu subaltern woman by the colonizer or indigenous colonial acolyte during the

emergency (as a rapable subject which consolidates colonial potency in crisis - a limit between dominator and insurgent)³, nor how the Gikuyu subaltern woman is produced in nationalist Mau Mau literature (as a strategic silence upon which male political and cultural prerogatives are founded, or as a limit between colonized/insurgent and colonizer).

Spivak, commenting on one of the omissions of the Subaltern Studies group, writes:

In a certain reading, the figure of woman is pervasively instrumental in the shifting of the function of discursive systems, as in insurgent mobilization. Questions of the mechanics of this instrumentality are seldom raised by our group. "Femininity" is as important a discursive field for the predominantly male insurgents as "religion". (1987: 215)

Njama's text is perhaps the most revealing exemplum of the ways in which 'femininity' was instrumentalized in narratives of insurgency within *Mau Mau*. He describes the administration of the *Batuni Oath* (a corruption of the English military usage 'platoon'), during which the initiate's penis was inserted into a hole in a goat's throat. The fighters in the Abedare mountains referred to their lovers as *kabatuni*, or 'small platoons' (Barnett and Njama, 1966: 242). There is an obvious link established here between male virility, resistance, and the diminution of women. The sexual imagery in oathing procedures, and particularly in the more advanced oaths, such as the *Batuni* oath, was pervasive (see Maloba, 1993: 104-106). In addition, the leadership of *Mau Mau* referred to its enemies (loyalists, traitors and homeguards) as *thata cia bururi*, 'the barren ones of the country' (Barnett and Njama, 1966: 349). Perhaps more interesting are the (contested) accounts of the use of women's private parts in oathing ceremonies:

Other versions of these oaths that have been retrieved do, however, point out the extensive use of women and sexual acts between them and the initiates during the oath-taking ceremonies. It would be fair to say that

these oaths, like the unity oath and the Batuni oath, were not uniform in details throughout Kikuyuland. Lack of uniformity suggests that improvisation or local circumstances determined to some extent the text of these oaths. (Maloba, 1993: 106; see also 195, note 57)

Karari Njama's text marks an ambivalent relation to women within the movement:

'To feed and defend women [I thought] is an unnecessary burden to our warriors. Sleeping with them would bring calamity to our camps, weaken our *itungati* [warriors] and, probably, they would become pregnant and would be unable to run away from the enemies, and they would be killed...For generations, women had been a source of conflicts between men...' (1966: 242)

In other *Mau Mau* narratives - most notably in Kariuki's - the struggles of female insurgents are either strategically omitted, or received as textual asides.

Despite the lack of archival material dealing with the struggles and aims of women within *Mau Mau*, their rôle within the movement was crucial to its successes, and possibly to its survival. Women's rôles:

...included "organization and maintenance of the supply lines which directed food, supplies, medicine, guns and information to the forest forces." Those women who went to the forest were "responsible for cooking, water-hauling, knitting sweaters etc."...Women formed the valuable link between the forest fighters and the passive wing in the reserves. Those women who went to the forests tended on the whole to be engaged in noncombatant roles, acting as transport, signals, medical corps and ordnance to their male counterparts." (Maloba, 1993: 177, quoting Presley and Gachihi)

Further, *Mau Mau* women in the reserves and in the city procured ammunition for the forest fighters by submitting to intercourse with Government forces:

Bullets had become token payment [from security force

personnel] to prostitutes who later sent them to our warriors. (Barnett and Njama, 1966: 208)

[Some] Mau Mau women did seduce British soldiers in the hope of receiving a bullet or two in return. (Edgerton, 1989: 168)

Accounts of Mau Mau rarely take cognisance of the vital rôle played by Kenyan women during the Emergency. Significantly, the settler's attempts to produce a limit between the Selfsame (the recognizable and the domestic) and the Other (the (un)familiar and the bestial) translated into a strategy whereby Mau Mau's link with its supporters in the reserves was severed.

Colonial military strategy was articulated in five phases:

- 1) Operation Jock Scott (1952); in which the leaders of the Kenya African Union were arrested and detained.
- 2) Operation Anvil (1954); in which 25 000 men of the government's forces surrounded Nairobi and searched it, sector by sector, for Mau Mau operatives. 24 000 Kenyans were arrested and sent to detention camps.
- 3) The Villagization program; which entailed the relocation of Gikuyu civilians to 'safe' villages (i.e. surrounded by barbed wire and cut off from the forest by a trench 50 miles long, 10 feet deep and 16 feet wide, filled with barbed wire, sharpened stakes and booby traps), in order to minimize the contact between Mau Mau and its 'passive' wing.
- 4) Operations Hammer, Schlemozzle, Bullrush, Dante, Hannibal and First Flute (1955-1956); in which the Abedare forest was swept for insurgents.
- 5) The Rehabilitation program (1953-1956); in which Mau Mau suspects were detained in concentration camps until confessing the oath, after which they graduated through successive camps

(the 'pipe-line') until they were considered to be innocuous enough for release. Some 80 000 Gikuyu were detained.

I view the Villagization program and the Rehabilitation program as symptomatic of the colonial constructions of *Mau Mau*. The former entailed the production of a 'safe', domesticated space for the colonized - free of the dangerous influences of oath-administrators, insurgents and the like - and managed according to curfews - which restricted the exchange of arms, supplies and information to the insurgents. It is interesting to note that Gikuyu women were produced as a limit between the sanitized (read colonized) space of the villages and the primeval space which the forest-fighters occupied: almost all of the women in the villages were coerced into building the trench which would limit *Mau Mau's* access to supplies, food and ammunition. The space between the reserves and the forest was labelled a no-go area, in which any trespassers were liable to be shot on sight (the definition of a trespasser of this space carried an unwritten racial inscription). Here, the colonizing power used Gikuyu women to produce, in space, a margin between the domestic (the Selfsame) and the untamed (the Other). Thus, the rural landscape during the Kenyan Emergency became a metonym for the colonial discourse which constructed *Mau Mau* as the familiar devil; an alterity which could not be repressed in terms of a dialectic of desire, by virtue of *Mau Mau's* ability to return and disrupt the economy of the Selfsame.

The Rehabilitation program entailed the exorcism of the familiar devil through confession, brainwashing, propagandist education and, if all else failed, beatings. In the 'rehabilitation' camps, *Mau Mau* as anti-knowledge could be unlearned by exposure to the persuasiveness of the narrative of Western civilization's supremacy over African culture. Equally, male Gikuyu subjects could be produced as rapable or feminized subjects (which consolidated the colonizer's crisis of potency in relation to *Mau Mau's* rupturing of the Imperial narrative) in the torture chamber - torture is first and foremost an invasion

of the body's thresholds: an invasion of the body's space, surface and orifices which raises pain levels in order to exact a narrative which corroborates Imperial mastery. Significantly, the treatment of prisoners in the camps by their guards and superintendents was as depraved as anything the settlers had claimed in regard to *Mau Mau* atrocities. If *Mau Mau* was barbarous, primitive, bestial and atavistic, then the confession of the oath broke *Mau Mau's* hold on the backward African's superstition. Confession implied complicity with the colonial authorities, hence with the broader Imperialist project, and was aimed at producing the comfortable stereotype of the affable, docile African. Confession therefore entailed the production of a narrative which substantiated the Imperialist project.

The torture used to obtain confessions might thus be viewed as a technology of the body, calculated according to an algebra of physical pain and mental hardship, in which African cultural inscriptions of the black body (whether traditionalist or nationalist) were ignored as a blank slate on which the Imperialist narrative might be written. The function of the pipeline was to re-consolidate the settlers' position in Kenya by producing an alterity - recuperable into the dialectical enclosure - which would echo the Word of the Selfsame, and thus occupy the subject-position of Imperialism's self-consolidating other, and which could be re-situated within the 'villagised' settlements, or *locations*.

These strategies proved, ultimately, to be deconstructive. In Hola detention camp, 11 recalcitrant prisoners designated as 'hardcore' *Mau Mau* were beaten to death for refusing to work. A British parliamentary inquiry into the beating revealed an attempt to cover up the beating. After the exposure of the cover-up showed the settlers' political position in Kenya to be untenable, the parliament of the 'mother country' resolved to institute a programme in terms of which Kenyan independence might be realised.

Chapter 5

Reading Against the Grain (of Wheat): family, community, Mumbi, Mau Mau

In this chapter, I will focus on Ngugi's representations of 'Mau Mau' in A Grain of Wheat. I will show how colonial representations of Mau Mau inform his narrativization of Kenyan history and I will continue the line of argument which I developed in my first chapter - that the primary wounding or injury effected by colonization is psychosexual (a denial of potency). Ngugi adopts a number of strategies in order to recuperate male potency. These strategies consist in silencing the female representations in A Grain of Wheat. As such, Ngugi's constructions of Mau Mau circumscribe female speech. Although the novel offers a number of positive representations of Gikuyu women, in which their speech is privileged, this speech is always susceptible to reappropriation by the patriarchal discourse which frames the representations of the subaltern (sexed) subject. Paradoxically, Ngugi's representations of Mau Mau transgress colonial representations.

Ngugi's Ambivalence Towards Mau Mau.

Despite his espousal of Marxism while at Leeds University, Ngugi's fictional representation of Mau Mau reveals an exceptional ambivalence towards Mau Mau violence. David Maughan Brown argues that this contradiction:

...is attributable to two factors. Firstly, the fiction is clearly rendering visible residual ideological formations, most traces of which have been consciously expunged from [Ngugi's] essays... Secondly, Ngugi's notion of 'good' fiction, based on an aesthetic ideology derived from his literary 'education' in English departments oriented towards traditional critical orthodoxies, demanded a 'balance' which prevented the fictional expression of certain positions (particularly those tending towards the deconstruction of concepts like 'violence') articulated outside the fiction. (1985: 252)

Maughan Brown suggests that Ngugi's representations of Mau Mau are tainted by an emphasis on individualism, rather than on the collective (but by no means homogenous) resistance of the community:

Ngugi's general implication seems to be that once concepts like 'the masses' and 'collective consciousness' are subjected to the test of close-up scrutiny what emerges is a network of private, self-delusory, messianic identifications which testify to an underlying principle of competition as the mainspring of human conduct. Thus endemic guilt and bad faith underlie even the 'best deeds' - another formula for original sin. (1985: 249-250)

This stress on individualism problematizes Ngugi's Marxian socio-political project, because the fictional representatives of collective resistance emerge only as savage killers (General R., who has assassinated a clergyman) or rapists (Koinandu) or self-styled heroes (Kihika). In my analysis, Ngugi's stress on individualism may be traced to his valorization of traditional Gikuyu family structures which are, in turn, predicated on asymmetrical constructions of gender. Maughan Brown continues:

If everyone is the victim of his or her private desires and vainglories, then of course a traitor is no more than 'the mirror held up to human nature' - which merely leaves the novel with the difficulty of explaining how it was that government force numbering 50,000, and having the collaboration of tens of thousands of home guards, took four years to neutralise whoever it was - a motley band of bandits with half-crazed leaders? - they were fighting against. And of course this is what *A Grain of Wheat* so spectacularly fails to touch on. (1985: 250)

The Mau Mau characters in the novel bear closer examination, but it is first necessary to examine some of the possible reasons for Ngugi's residual distrust of the resistance movement. Firstly, his half-brother (Mwangi) was an 'active' member of the KLFA. Secondly, and as a result, his mother underwent 'three months of torture at Kamiriithu home-guard post' (*Detained*, 1981: 109). Finally, on a first reading of *A Grain of Wheat*, I was struck by

the pathos of Gitogo's murder at the hands of the Security Forces. It seemed to me to be a gratuitous representation of settler atrocities under the Emergency: a deaf and mute Gikuyu wishes to warn his mother of the approach of the government forces and is shot in the back because he does not register the command to 'Halt' (6). However, this is an important autographic moment in the novel, because Ngugi's 'deaf-and-dumb step-brother [was] shot dead in circumstances identical to those of Gitogo...' (Sicherman, 1990: 3, citing Cook and Okenimpke). In the passage dealing with Gitogo's murder, I find a tremendous significance in Gitogo's motives:

His mind's eye vividly saw scenes of wicked deeds and blood. He rushed through the back door, and jumped over a fence into the fields, now agitated by the insecurity to which his mother lay exposed. Urgency, home, mother: the images flashed through his mind. His muscles alone would protect her. (6)

I would suggest that 'woman' in A Grain of Wheat is produced as the discursive interstice/intersection between Mau Mau and the security forces, much as Ngugi's mother was produced as that interstice/intersection at one point during his formative years. I concur with Maughan Brown's analysis of the novel, but I would add that the principle of communal unity which ostensibly underlies the novel is the category of 'the feminine'. My argument here coincides with Vaughan's analysis:

[Ngugi's] treatment of the significance of the experience of women tends to work symbolically and metaphorically rather than by means of a plain and open realism. Nevertheless, it is clear that for Ngugi...women have a very specific relation to community and communal values. (1981: 48)

'Woman' enables 'the community' - and therefore, the economy of significance - in A Grain of Wheat. The sign 'woman', as it is exchanged between characters in the text (via desire) and between author and readership (via significance), is crucial to Ngugi's representation of Kenya during the Emergency. The characters may

be indexed according to their male-female relations, and the pivotal character is, of course, Mumbi; the female 'archetype' in Gikuyu culture.

Like the signs 'community' or 'Kenya', Mumbi forms the nexus of social relations between the male protagonists. She is Gikonyo's wife, and since the category of the familial and domestic is a privileged realm in A Grain of Wheat, this relationship is the most important in terms of Ngugi's politics. Mumbi is Kihika's sister, and this relationship translates the Messianism implicit in Ngugi's subject-formation under christological discourses:

Mumbi was always moved by her brother's words into visions of a heroic past in other lands marked by acts of sacrificial martyrdom; a ritual mist surrounded those far-away lands and years, a vague richness that excited and appealed to her. She could not visualize anything heroic in men and women being run over by trains. The thought of such murky scenes revolted her. Her idea of glory was something nearer the agony of Christ at the Garden of Gethsemane. (77)

Mumbi and Karanja conceive a child in an illegitimate relationship and the uterine textual organization of the novel places Karanja - as homeguard - in an illegitimate relation to post-independence Kenya. Further, Karanja becomes a homeguard because he wishes to win Mumbi for himself.

The Mau Mau figures in the novel are all constructed under the aegis of 'woman'; or rather, various 'women'. Kihika's entry into the public - though clandestine - domain of insurrection entails leaving behind a private or domestic domain as Wambuku's lover. These two domains are established by a crucial misunderstanding between the pair:

'You'll not go away from me. You'll not leave me alone,' she said in desperation.
'Never!' Kihika cried in ecstasy, seeing Wambuku at his side always. When the call for action came, he alone among the other men would have a woman he loved fighting at his side.

His one would like a knife stabbed Wambuku, thrilling her into a momentary vision of happiness now and ever; would Kihika now leave the demon [of political resistance] alone, content with life in the village like the other men?

They walked back to the dancers in the wood, hands linked, their faces lit, both happy, for the moment, in their separate delusions. (86)

The passage severs the female 'domestic' from the male domain of 'culture/politics' and these gender binates permeate the narrative: they are crucial in the production of 'woman' as the interstitial silence (produced by colluding patriarchies) between the government forces and the insurgent. Another example of the production of this interstice/intersection may be found in Mugo's confession to Mumbi:

'I saw a man whose manhood was broken with pincers. He came out of the screening office and fell down and he cried: to know I will never touch my wife again, oh God, can I ever look in the eyes after this? For me I only looked into an abyss and deep inside I only saw a darkness I could not penetrate.' (160)

If resistance in A Grain of Wheat is predicated on male potency, then Mugo's relation to resistance is that of impotence. The 'abyss' (which constitutes Mugo's self-image) is a frequently-used symbol for 'woman' constructed according to a model of lack under a phallogentrism which produces desire as an exclusively male prerogative. Like the castrated man, Mugo faces a crisis of potency (an inability to 'penetrate') before the emasculating machinery of the colonial government. 'Woman' as an interstice/intersection between the government forces and the detainees is both a model for victimhood/impotence and a measure of the potency of resistance in Ngugi's narrative.

Ngugi instrumentalizes female voices to produce woman as an interstice between conflicting discursive formations during the crisis of insurgency:

Men, finding women like Mumbi on the roof hammering in the nails, stopped to tease them: it was all because

a woman - a new Wangu - in England - had been crowned: what good ever came of a woman's rule?

'Aah, but that is not true,' the women would reply at times, glad for the interruption. 'Doesn't Governor Baring, who rules Kenya, have a penis?'

'Aah, it's still the woman's shauri [affair]. See how you women have sent all the men to detention for their penis to rot there, unwilling husbands to Queen Elizabeth?'

'And to the forests, too,' the women would burst out, the raillery turning into bitterness. And without another word the men would hurry back to their own sites to continue the metallic cries of the hammer and nail. (124)

The passage likens the Emergency to the mythical Gikuyu matriarchy under Wangu Makeri in order to rationalize Gikuyu male dominance of public affairs. The rejoinder which refers to Mau Mau fighters in the forest presumably offers resistance as a recuperation of Gikuyu male potency. Incidentally, the roofs of the huts in New Thabai are made of metal, indicating that the traditional thatching (performed by women) has been replaced. As such, the Emergency has, in Ngugi's analysis, severed the Gikuyu from the time-honoured traditions which constitute their history. What I find interesting, however, is that this history is depicted in androcentric terms.

Kihika is not the only Mau Mau representative whose subjectivity is formed under the aegis of the sign 'woman'. Muhoya (General R.) begins his military training with the British in World War 1 after he has attempted, unsuccessfully, to rescue his mother from being beaten by his father, and has been expelled from his home village (184-185). General R. confesses to Koinandu that Reverend Jackson Kigundu (the clergyman General R. has executed) 'looked like [his] father' (191). Koinandu's subjectivity is established in terms of the rape of Dr. Lynd, in which his violation of her both affirms and denies his potency as a member of the resistance movement:

[Not] one of the bloody scenes in which he had taken part had broken into his sleep. On the contrary the fight for freedom had given him a purpose. It had made him a man. Why then did her ghost shake him so?... He

hated the whiteman - every one. He was being avenged on them now; he felt their frightened cry in the woman's wild breathing. Whiteman nothing. Whiteman nothing. Doing to you what you did to us - to black people - he told himself as he thrust into her in fear and cruel desperation. (185-186)

Koinandu's act is, as Maughan Brown notes, the one account in all the literature on Mau Mau of the rape of a white woman by a Mau Mau member (1981: 18). Maughan Brown is also correct in pointing out that Koinandu does not enjoy the sympathy of the author-function. Nevertheless, this passage constructs 'woman' (as biological, rather than class or racial entity) as the interstice/intersection between the discursive formations produced by freedom fighter and colonist. The mechanisms of gender representation which operate elsewhere in A Grain of Wheat are in evidence even here.

Ngugi's representations of Mau Mau do not privilege the rank and file members (such as Koinandu) or even the peasant leadership (General R.'s real name, Muhoya, also denotes 'a tenant farmer' or *Muhoi*). Rather, Ngugi privileges a literate, Christian Mau Mau, which synthesizes the ideal of a principled rebellion. Kihika carries a double 'historical' inscription. Firstly, the details of his life parallel those of Dedan Kimathi, a prominent general in the Land and Freedom Army (cf. Sicherman, 1990: 133-135). Secondly, his name evokes that of one of the *arathi* (prophets), Reuben Kihiko, who was the leader of a breakaway Christian sect called the *Dini ya Jesu Kristo*. Kihiko's followers espoused a Gikuyu traditionalist version of the Christian myth, and were considered by colonial authorities to be subversive. In December 1947, they clashed with the Kenyan police and killed three policeman, resulting in Kihiko's arrest and execution (Rosberg and Nottingham, 1966: 327-328). Certain colonial accounts of Mau Mau claim the insurgency had its origins in sects such as the *Dini ya Jesu Kristo* (for example, Rawcliffe, 1954: 34). In A Grain of Wheat, Ngugi's representation of Mau Mau is not necessarily ideologically-aligned with colonial narratives of the insurgency's origins. Rather, Kihika as both Kimathi and

Kihiko indexes Ngugi's attempt to bridge the disparate subtexts of Christian nationalism and Gikuyu traditionalism. Kimathi was a christian rebel and Kihiko was a rebellious christian (the lower case denotes a para-institutional theology), and these two models fit comfortably together as prototypes of principled resistance in Kenya. This is clearly the sort of resistance Ngugi privileged before writing A Grain of Wheat - in *Mau Mau, Violence and Culture* (1963, collected in Homecoming) he writes:

Violence in order to change an intolerable unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal, and diminishes man. (1972: 28)

In *Church, Culture and Politics* (1970, collected in Homecoming), Ngugi enunciates the Churches' complicity with Imperialism, but qualifies his arguments in this way:

...I want to stress that I am talking of the Church as a corporate body, an institution, and not of the individual holders of the faith. (1972: 34)

This qualification points to a residual sympathy towards Christianity and individualism in Ngugi, and perhaps accounts for the crisis between Christian nationalism, Gikuyu traditionalism and socialism in A Grain of Wheat. If Ngugi is an apologist for christology at this point in his development, it is obviously the christological emphasis on non-violence which he is importing into his novel. Significantly, however, the (para-institutional) theology which Ngugi upholds in his novel is much the same as that of the African independent churches: it legitimizes polygamy as a form of domestic organization and clitoridectomy as a determinant in the socio-political (and discursive) construction of female sexuality.

Some critics have not perceived anything problematic with the ways in which 'femininity' is constructed in A Grain of Wheat. Charles A. Nama argues, in *Daughters of Moombi*, that Ngugi's

heroines occupy a special place within his fiction, with respect to their function as custodians and defenders of traditional Gikuyu aesthetics and culture. What Nama does not interrogate is the fundamental sexism which undergirds Gikuyu traditional culture. This oversight manifests as a structural anomaly in Nama's article, in which his misreading of one of the passages of A Grain of Wheat is perhaps attributable to the traditionalist interests which the title of his article implies:

When Karanja, Kihika and Gitongo [sic] encounter Mumbi at Gikonyo's workshop she is addressed in glowing terms by Karanga [sic], "Mother of Men, we have come make us some tea"...These tributes to Mumbi also illustrate her role in the world of the novel. (1986, 142)

In fact, Karanja addresses Wangari, and he addresses her in this way, "'Mother of men, we have come. Make us tea.'" (70). Nama's misreading is perhaps not terribly important in the broader scheme of the novel. After all, Wangari is also a 'traditional heroine'. However, this is exactly where I take issue with his reading of Ngugi's fiction. The 'tribute' to Wangari (or Mumbi, or 'woman') dissimulates Gikuyu male privilege by revering Gikuyu women's reproductive and child-rearing capacities, in terms of a Gikuyu traditional worldview which is symptomatic of the uterine social organization of traditional Gikuyu society. 'Woman' is thus constituted as a 'heroine' while she performs her duties as a gender-oppressed agency. The 'tribute' - 'Mother of men' - becomes remarkably sinister if it is read in terms of Spivak's critique of Freud:

Everywhere there is a non-confrontation with the idea of the womb as a workshop, except to produce a surrogate penis. (1987: 81)

Although (and also, since) they are marginal characters, mothers in Ngugi's novel are *instrumental* in the construction of male subjectivities.

Mugo's stature as a half-outsider in the community is, I think,

integrally linked with his lack of a mother. He has two mother substitutes: his aunt, and the old woman who is Gitogo's mother. His aunt is a drunkard and an imperious harridan, and her subjectivity perhaps corresponds with the other matriarchs in the novel - Queen Elizabeth and Wangu Makeri. The matriarchs share an affinity in that they all compromise male potency and 'potentially' threaten the phallocentric 'thrust' of the novel's narration of history. Mugo's aunt, Waitherero, asks him "...what's your penis worth?" (8) and Mugo's 'one desire' is to kill her by strangulation (8-9). This desire is to castrate rather than to be castrated and it reappears in the narrative when Mugo attempts to throttle Mumbi after he has confessed to informing on Kihika (following which Kihika is executed by hanging).

Mumbi is Mugo's *confiteor* and 'inspires [his] social redemption' (Vaughan, 1981: 48). She also speculates about Mugo's desire for her before his confession to her:

The thrill sharpened as later in that evening she set out for Mugo's hut. The day had been dull and misty; the night seemed darker than usual; Mumbi felt like a girl again, braving the dark and the wind and the storm, to meet her lover. What if Mugo should - she left the question and answer in abeyance. (158)

In the light, she noticed the restlessness about Mugo. His proud distance had diminished, his dark eyes had that debauched look one sees in drink-addicts. He sat away from her, carefully, as if he was afraid of her. He was handsome and lonely, she bit her lower lip to steady herself. She looked around the bare hut whose walls were barely lit by the oil-lamp.

'It is a little empty,' he said brusquely, breaking into her thoughts.

'It is alright for a man. An unmarried person has few needs.' She laughed uneasily. She was puzzled by his unfriendliness and fear, a violent contrast to the excitement in his eyes yesterday. Yet she allowed irrelevant thoughts to capture her fancy; if he should want me - If he should- (159)

Mumbi's version of Messianism (quoted above) is that of Christ betrayed. Mugo is Kihika's Judas, and his confession to Mumbi in

private translates into his confession in public. Mugo's interior monologue, in which he recalls his confession to her, reveals Mumbi's production as the intersection between colonial and nationalist discursive formations, the association between Mumbi and a utopia, and finally, the construction of Mumbi's subjectivity as consubstantial with the Emergency landscape:

[Mumbi] had sat there, and talked to him and given him a glimpse of a new earth...That night, he hardly closed his eyes. The picture of Mumbi merged with that of the village and the detention camps. He would look at Mumbi and she would immediately change into his aunt or the old woman. (203, emphasis added)

Mumbi's merging with the village and the detention camps plays out the dialectic of 'private' and 'public' which permeates the narrative. The village, Thabai, also plays out this dialectic in a crucial way and its naming also entails a propering (through the appropriative mechanisms of property, propriety, properness) of 'woman' by the patriarchal discourse which informs, and even unites, an otherwise disparate narrative. If A Grain of Wheat is framed by a Gikuyu traditional discourse, then it is the womb as a site of production that bears the brunt of the onslaught on the Gikuyu by the colonial authorities. The village in which the novel is predominantly set, Thabai (Kenya in microcosm), denotes the stinging nettles which were inserted into Gikuyu women's vaginas as a means of torture in institutions such as the detention camps (cf. Njama and Barnett, 1966: 209). Mumbi's transition into Mugo's 'two mothers-by-proxy' is, I think, symptomatic of the uterine textual organization of the novel. In other words, once 'woman' is defined as a mothering-function (at the expense of desire which Spivak or Cixous might term 'clitoral') her subjectivity is reduced to the monadic womb. It is once Mugo has confessed that he is 'reunited' with the old woman, a mother-by-proxy, who mistakes him for her own son, Gitogo (205). Bearing in mind that Gitogo's construction reveals a 'private' investment on Ngugi's part, I would argue that this moment in the narrative is ostensibly a moment of reconciliation between the discrete spheres of 'private' and 'public'. Mumbi now

seems 'a thing of the past' (205).

'Woman' is also produced as the juncture between 'the domestic' and 'the political' when Mugo thinks of betraying Kihika:

The novelty and the nearness of the scheme [of betraying Kihika, and its perceived rewards of money, a big house, a wife with which to 'get' children] added to his present thrill. He had never before considered women in relation to his man's body. Now pictures of various girls he had seen in the village passed through his mind. He would flash his victory before the eyes of his aunt's ghost. His place in society would be established. (171)

'Such a tall man - his thing is probably as long as a donkey's penis.' (172)

The second quotation, spoken by a homeguard at Thompson's office, is, in an absurd sense, an answer to Waitherero's question ('what's your penis worth?').

Maughan Brown implies the importance of 'woman' - in this case, Mumbi - as a sign positioned at the juncture of the 'domestic' and the 'political':

...Judas can only become a hero through his courage in making a spectacular public confession - which is very much the Garden of Gethsemane rather than the railroad track route to martyrdom. (1981: 13)

Other than confessing to Kihika's betrayal¹, Mugo's one significant act of heroism occurs when he saves a woman, pregnant with child, from a beating by the homeguards. His stature within the community is indicated in the song which relates his heroism:

And he jumped into the trench,
The words he told the soldier pierced my heart like a
spear;
You will not beat a pregnant woman, he said,
You will not beat a pregnant woman, he told the
soldier (156)

The woman's pregnancy is manifestly significant when one views Ngugi's political vision as informed by phallocentric narratives of resistance. As in nationalist and Imperialist accounts of Mau Mau, his text positions the subaltern as the limit between Mau Mau and the government forces. Wambuku, whom Mugo tries to save from the beating, has been Kihika's lover prior to his involvement in active combat, and dies during pregnancy and it is Kihika who has remarked: '"With us, Kenya is our mother."' (78).

Karanja's relations with his mother are also significant. His idleness is a source of contention between them and, in a traditional society such as that of the peasants, this idleness compounds Wairimu's economic hardship. She disapproves of Karanja's activities in the homeguard but, as a long-suffering mother, consoles herself with the traditional saying (itself complicit with the gender-subjection of the sexed subaltern) 'a child from your own womb is never thrown away' (196).

The description of Uhuru celebrations renders visible the patriarchal subtext which informs A Grain of Wheat:

As usual, on such occasions, some young men walked in gangs, carrying torches, lurked and whispered in dark corners and the fringes, really looking for love-mates among the crowd. Mothers warned their daughters to take care not to be raped in the dark. The girls danced in the middle, thrusting out their buttocks provokingly, knowing that the men in corners watched them. Everybody waited for something to happen. This 'waiting' and the uncertainty that went with it - like a woman torn between fear and joy during birth motions - was a taut cord beneath the screams and shouts and the laughter. (177)

The villagers wait outside Mugo's hut and, at the hour of Independence, the women cry out 'the five Ngemi to welcome a son at birth or at circumcision' (178). The novel's narration of the history of resistance explicitly locates Independence within the ambit of copulation and reproduction. A Grain of Wheat instrumentalizes 'woman' as a metaphor for the state in the

novel's narration of history. The upshot of these associations is that the Kenya of A Grain of Wheat emerges as a theatre of desire and gender-political interest.

The most disturbing aspect of A Grain of Wheat is the ideological framing of gender representations in Gikuyu oral tradition. Gikonyo and Mumbi are not only characters in a post-independence Kenyan novel. Their names also evoke the two legendary founders of the Gikuyu community; Gikuyu and Mumbi. The two characters of Ngugi's novel substitute for the archetypes of masculinity and femininity in Gikuyu culture. As such, each represents a gendered collectivity. Mumbi's name has remained unchanged, but Gikonyo's name is a derivative of 'Gikuyu'. His name also denotes the Lincoln bombers which used infra-red scanning to detect Mau Mau insurgents' body heat in the forest. The bombers were dubbed 'Gikonyo' (meaning, literally, 'navel') because the doors of their bomb-bays were located beneath the planes. In terms of this association, Gikonyo represents the Gikuyu male peasant whose identity has been fragmented by colonial strategies of detection and detention during the Kenyan Emergency. His activity as a Mau Mau member is dispersed across three sites: as a member of the passive wing in Thabai, as a detainee in Rira, as a fighter in the forest. However, his name also invokes his separation from the mythical past in which 'Gikuyu' reigned supreme. Mumbi, on the other hand, represents both a mythical past and, by the conclusion of the novel, a utopian future. She is excluded from the present and, therefore, from History itself. Mumbi is thus located at the furthestmost reaches of the Gikuyu historical experience; as a source (at the origin) from which the gravid effects of inhabiting a fissured history will issue.

The resistance song which Gikonyo sings to Mumbi invokes other inscriptions of his relationship with her:

'Gikuyu na Mumbi,
Gikuyu na Mumbi
Gikuyu na Mumbi

Nikihiu ngwatiro.' (69)

The first phrase in the song denotes not only the founders of the Gikuyu community, but was also one of the names which the KLFA used for itself. The second phrase is 'a proverb suggesting the pressure of time...Ngugi translates it "the firebrand is burned at the handle"' (Sicherman, 1990: 201). In terms of this translation, the exchange between Gikonyo and Mumbi relates the urgent need for military successes in the *Mau Mau* insurgency. However, the song is also framed by gendering. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin state:

'Nikihiu' literally means that something is 'cooked'. Ngwatiro is literally a 'handle'. But when used together the term means that someone is in trouble because the handle is too hot. The song as invented by Kihika means that the relationship between man and woman spells 'trouble'. The relationship is 'too hot to handle' and as a chorus it has both sexual and political overtones. (1989: 58)

Mumbi finds a poignant irony in this situation:

'Oh Carpenter, Carpenter. So you know why I came?'
'I don't!' he said, puzzled.
'But you sing to *me* and Gikuyu telling us it is burnt at the handle.'...
She turned to a small basket she was carrying and took out a panga.
'You see this panga needs a wooden handle. The old one was burned in the fire by mistake. My mother wants it quickly because it is the only one she has got for cultivating. (70)

The allusions in this passage constitute an apposite example of the operation of cultural difference in A Grain of Wheat. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin assert:

This example reconfirms that absence which lies at the point of interface between the two cultures. Here it is demonstrated by Ngugi's refusal to gloss the song directly and the consequent exchange between man and woman. This does not mean that the song cannot be understood once the whole context is grasped, but rather that the process of allusion installs

linguistic difference itself as a subject of the text.
(1989: *ibid.*)

This comment on Ngugi's novel is astute, but the question left unexamined by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin is: 'Who is *subjected* by linguistic difference in A Grain of Wheat?' This episode in the novel introduces the relationship between Gikonyo and Mumbi, which - prior to Gikonyo's detention - is depicted as an harmonious extension of Gikonyo's organic relation to his work as Gikuyu craftsman and artist. When he fixes the handle of the panga, his work is a labour of love:

Gikonyo saw Mumbi's gait, her very gestures, in the feel and movement in the plane. Her voice was in the air as he bent down and traced the shape of the panga on the wood. Her breath gave him power...As he hammered the thin ends of the nails into caps, another wave of power swept through him. New strength entered his right hand. He brought the hammer down, up, and brought the hammer down. He felt free. Everything, Thabai, the whole world was under the control of his hand. Suddenly the wave of power broke into an ecstasy, an exultation. Peace settled in his heart. He felt a holy calm; he was in love with all the earth.
(71)

The climactic language in this passage is similar to the tone of the passage which describes the consummation of Gikonyo's love for Mumbi:

Now her body gleamed in the sun. Her eyes were soft and wild and submissive and defiant. Gikonyo passed his hands through her hair and over her breasts, slowly coaxing and smoothing stiffness from her body, until she lay limp in his hands. Suddenly, Gikonyo found himself suspended in a void, he was near breaking point and as he swooned into the dark depth he heard a moan escape Mumbi's parted lips. She held him tight to herself. Their breath was now one. The earth moved beneath their one body into a stillness.
(80)

Gikonyo's love-making is implicitly a form of craftsmanship; smoothing out the rough edges of the embattled man-woman relationship to which the resistance song refers. The setting in

which Gikonyo and Mumbi have sex is the forest, which is also the setting of the resistance staged by *Mau Mau*, as well as the source of raw material (wood) for Gikonyo's labour as a carpenter. Michael Vaughan's article on A Grain of Wheat, with which I am in general agreement, has the following to say about the relation between Gikonyo's work and his love for Mumbi:

Because of the nature of Gikonyo's work - that of an independent craftsman - Ngugi is able to seize the element of personal control over the labour process and treat it as a moment of purely individual self-realisation. Gikonyo fuses with the totality. But this is the totality of creation, of nature, not of society.

In the second place, the prosaic actuality of the labour process counts for nothing here. Economic life has no meaning in itself. The cycle of labour becomes meaningful when it is meshed with the cycle of romantic love. (1981: 37)

The relationship between Gikonyo and Mumbi, initiated by the resistance song, is imbricated in an economy of signs which permeate the narrative, and Mumbi is the figure of the subaltern which consolidates these signs, and is subjected by them.

The most covert patriarchal strategy of Ngugi's novel is that it equates a complex national confrontation with an estrangement between spouses. Of course, the Emergency did fragment the lives of families and communities, and it would seem obvious to use a love-relationship as a model for social discord or social cohesion at the most nucleated level. However, the intervention of a feminist discourse reveals that even the homestead is the site of an ideological struggle between subjects whose genders, sexualities and identities are socially constructed and hierarchically organised. By framing Gikonyo and Mumbi's relationship in orature, Ngugi makes this ideological struggle explicit:

It was many, many years ago. Then women ruled the land of the Agikuyu. Men had no property, they were only there to serve the whims and needs of the women. Those were hard years. So they waited for the women to go to

war, they plotted a revolt, taking an oath of secrecy to keep them bound each to each in the common pursuit of freedom. They would sleep with all the women at once, for didn't they know the heroines would return hungry for love and relaxation? Fate did the rest; women were pregnant; the takeover met with little resistance. (11)

The 'history' given here is linked explicitly with the history of colonization under the British, ruled by a female monarch (*idem*). Gatu's story in the concentration camp, undermines the authority of the British monarch by representing her as a prostitute, willing to sell her body in exchange for the valley in which he was born:

'She said (mimics her): "If you sell me your valley, I'll let you...once." Women are women you know. "In my country," I told her, "we do not buy that thing from our women. We get it free." But man, my own thing troubled me. I had not seen a woman for many years. However, before I could even say anything more, she had called in her soldiers, who bound my hands and feet and drew me out of the valley."...
'Man,' he said after the laughter. 'I wish I had agreed at once to satisfy my thing which troubles me to this day.' (94, first ellipsis in the original)

Sex translates as a form of political conquest in this passage. This thematic is also implicit in Koinandu's memory of raping Dr Lynd:

He and the two men laid her on the ground. He vibrated with fear and intense hatred. He hated the whiteman - every one. He was being avenged on them now; he felt their frightened cry in the woman's wild breathing. Whiteman nothing. Whiteman nothing. Doing to you what you did to us - to black people - he told himself as he thrust into her in fear and cruel desperation. (185-186)

The implications of these passages for Gikonyo and Mumbi's future might at first seem minimal. After all, at the novel's conclusion, Gikonyo determines to 'reckon with her feelings, her thoughts, her desires' (213), promising a consensual relationship between the spouses. However, the symbology - by which I imply

not the meaning constituted by symbols, but a code of symbols constituting ideology - that informs Gikonyo's view(ing) of Mumbi invites a reappraisal of the conclusion. If a pre-lapsarian past was predicated upon a uterine social organization, in which the womb had been the site of the overthrow of a (mythical) matriarchy and the institution of the Gikuyu patriarchy, then the conclusion - where Gikonyo resolves to 'change the woman's figure' and 'carve a woman big - big with child' - presages the resumption of Gikuyu male privilege in culture; the postlapsarian utopia. On the novel's own terms, such a reading, in which nationhood is aligned with male potency, would not be unfounded. For example, during Gikonyo's incarceration, this association is made explicit despite the political setback to nationalist ideals when Kenyatta is found guilty by the colonial authorities:

His reunion with Mumbi would see the birth of a new Kenya...Jomo had lost the case at Kapenguria. The whiteman would silence the father and the orphans would be left without a helper. (92)

The orphans' 'mother' is not represented here, because Ngugi's economy of signs does not permit mothering any political function other than the (re)production of manpower required by post-independence Kenya. The 'mother' of these orphans is omitted from the discourse of resistance because resistance is the exclusive preserve of the male characters. Even the two female figures of resistance, Wambui and Njeri, are depicted in masculine terms. In the absence of her own political ambitions, Njeri joins the forest fighters because she loves Kihika:

'He is there,' she whispered to herself. Then she addressed him directly with a passionate devotion. 'You are my warrior.' She raised her voice, letting loose her long-suppressed anger. 'She does not love you Kihika. She does not care.' She walked a few more steps and then wheeled round, willing the waves of the dark to carry her declaration of eternal devotion to Kihika.

'I will come to you, my handsome warrior, I will come to you,' she cried, and she ran into her mother's hut trembling with the knowledge that she had made an irrevocable promise to Kihika. (89)

Wambui's construction as a figure of resistance is far more ambiguous. On one level, her activities during the Emergency are consistent with the resistance to colonial authority offered by the 'passive wing' of Mau Mau:

Wambui was not very old, although she had lost most of her teeth. During the Emergency, she carried secrets from the villages to the forest and back to the villages and towns. She knew the underground movements in Nakuru, Njoro, Elburgon and other places in and outside the Rift Valley. The story is told how she once carried a pistol tied to her thighs near the groin. She was dressed in long, wide and heavy clothes, the picture of decrepitude and senile decay. She was taking the gun to Naivasha. As luck would have it, she was suddenly caught in one of those sporadic military and police operations which plagued the country....Soon came her turn to be searched. Her tooth started aching; she twisted her lips, moaned; saliva tossed out of the corners of her mouth and flowed down her chin. The Gikuyu policeman searching her was saying in Swahili: Pole mama: made other sympathetic noises and went on searching. He started from her chest, rummaged under her armpits, gradually working his way down towards the vital spot. And suddenly Wambui screamed, the man stopped, astonished.

'The children of these days,' she began. 'Have you lost all your shame? Just because the whiteman tells you so, you would actually touch your own mother's...the woman who gave you birth? All right, I'll lift the clothes and you can have a look at your mother, it is so aged, and see what gain it'll bring you for the rest of your life.' She actually made as if to lift her clothes and expose her nakedness. The man involuntarily turned his eyes away. (19)

Wambui's evasion of colonial strategies of detection is an ingenious appeal to her revered position as a mother within traditional society, but it is also predicated upon the patriarchal ideology which undergirds the society's uterine organisation - the interpellation of the clitoridectomized female subject into the effaced subject-position of mother, after which the produce of the womb is named by the father's (Proper) name and reappropriated by culture. The pistol in this passage is of a dual symbolic import; because it is a symbol of anti-colonial resistance and because it invests Wambui with a phallogentric

significance. This ambivalent construction of female subjectivity is integral to the narrative. The female characters suffer under the Emergency conditions, endure in their private suffering, and emerge as referents for phallogentric public-political discourses.

Gikonyo's ideological position undergoes a significant shift in the detention camp. Initially, he is part of the conspiracy of silence waged by the *Mau Mau* suspects against the imperial power which detains them. However, Gikonyo decides to confess the oath in order to return to life in Thabai with Mumbi. This shift in position is marked by reference to the 'thread of life' which has been broken by his incarceration:

'Before, I was nothing. Now, I was a man. During our short period of married life, Mumbi made me feel it was all important...suddenly I discovered...no, it was as if I had made a covenant with God to be happy. How shall I say it? I took the woman in my arms - do you know the banana stem? I peeled off layer after layer, and I put out my hand, my trembling hand, to reach the Kiana coiled inside. (86, ellipsis and emphasis in the original)

Gikonyo walked towards detention with a brisk step and an assurance *born in his knowledge of love and life...*The day of deliverance was near at hand. Gikonyo would come back and take the thread of life, but this time in a land of glory and plenty. (90, emphasis added)

[The detainees] bore all the ills of the whiteman, believing somehow that he who would endure unto the end would receive leaves of victory. For Gikonyo, these would be given to him by Mumbi, whose trembling hands, as she held the green leaves he could so clearly picture. His reunion with Mumbi would see the *birth of a new Kenya*. (91-92, emphasis added)

As Gikonyo left the road and took a path into the fields, he could still hear the echo of his steps on the cement pavement four years back. The steps had followed him all through the pipe-line, for in spite of confession, Gikonyo was not released immediately ...Would the steps always follow him, he wondered, suddenly scared of meeting someone he had known in the

old days. He did not feel victorious, less so a hero. The green leaves were not for him. But then, Gikonyo did not want them. He only wanted to see his Mumbi and take up the thread of life where he had left it. (98)

The image of the 'thread of life' contains resonances of the umbilicus, or a succession of inseminations, which is the obvious metonym for a uterine social order, and which also links Gikonyo ('navel' - or 'umbilicus'; see Meyer, 1991: 33) to Mumbi. What are we to make of this symbology when we discover that banana leaves (*ngo'to*) are used in the ritual of circumcision and in oathing procedures, as an arch under which the initiates pass (and, after circumcision, as the 'plates' off of which they eat)? What, in turn, is the linguistic proximity (if any) of *ngo'to* to *rong'otho* (the clitoris)? Does the naming of Ngotho, the castrated father in Weep Not, Child, contain a broader socio-sexual significance? What may the critic assume when she discovers that the Gikuyu word for banana (*irigu*) also signifies uncircumcised girls (see Presley, 1992: 17 and Sicherman: 1990, 205). Does the Gikuyu saying, 'The woman who gives birth is like the banana tree: it breaks under the weight of its fruit', allude to the overthrow of the Gikuyu matriarchy, or should the critic accept its transcoded interpretation, "Maternity means pain to the mother" (Schipper, Source of All Evil, 1992: 67)? Ngugi's subsequent novel, Petals of Blood, hints at the symbology which informs female circumcision:

The men took over and sang the juicy sections of songs normally sung at circumcision.
 ...Njuguma nduku
 A big club.
 Ya gukura k-ru kabucu
 For pulling out a jaw of cunt.
 K-na igoto
 Cunt with banana leaves. (130)

The context of this allusion should be distinguished from the (provisional) significances of the banana plant in A Grain of Wheat. The song is recited by drunken guests at Chui's party and is a debasement of its function in traditional Gikuyu life. Its presence in Petals of Blood attests to the phallocentrism

implicit in Ngugi's historiographic project, but the phallocentrism of the latter novel operates in ways which are quite different from that which informs the gender representations in the earlier novel. The Gikuyu traditional belief systems which inform the 'thread of life' imagery contain a symbology which is heterogenous to my analysis of A Grain of Wheat. The imagery creates ambiguity about its alignment with patriarchal values. This places the imagery beyond any certain assertions by a feminist criticism, but not beyond suspicion of complicity with a phallocentric project. I would argue that when Gikonyo decides to reckon with Mumbi's desires, those desires are always subject to a mark of effacement, because she has already been symbolically clitoridectomized by Ngugi's narrative.

A Grain of Wheat predicates male potency upon circumcision. Wambui (whose construction is partially based upon Mary Nyanjiru, the first Kenyan woman to die in resistance to colonial rule) criticises the reticence of male workers to strike at a shoe factory:

She believed in the power of women to influence events, especially where men had failed to act, or seemed indecisive. Many people in old Thabai remembered her now-famous drama at the workers' strike in 1950. The strike was meant to paralyse the country and make it more difficult for the whiteman to govern. A few men who worked at a big shoe factory near Thabai and in the settled area, grumbled and even said, so the rumours went, that they would not come out on strike. The Party convened a general meeting at Rung'ei. At the height of the proceedings, Wambui suddenly broke through the crowd and led a group of women to the platform. She grabbed the microphone from the speakers. People were interested. Was there any circumcised man who felt water in his stomach at the sight of the whiteman? Women, she said, had brought their Mithuru and Miengu [long skirts and aprons] to the platform. Let therefore such men, she jeered, come forward, wear women's skirts and aprons and give up their trousers to the women...The next day all the men stayed away from work. (157)

Wambui's actions and words in this passage ostensibly offer her a position from which to transgress the cultural codes which

silence Gikuyu women's dissenting political voice. Paradoxically, this voice is recuperated into the Gikuyu patriarchy by the gender-framing of that dissent. The men strike, not because they have been persuaded of the necessity of strike action, but because they do not wish to be 'upstaged' by a woman. Wambui holds them accountable as members of a dominant and privileged gender, but her appeals to the potency or bravery of men also serve to reinforce that dominance and privilege.

Before Mumbi is relocated to New Thabai by the colonial authorities, her hut is set on fire. This event is charged with Gikuyu cultural significances. Firstly, the Gikuyu woman's hut (*Nyumba ya Mumbi* - 'House of Mumbi'; Sicherman, 1990: 228) is the equivalent of a gynaeceum²; all sexual relations between spouses take place in it (rather than in the dwelling of the husband - the *thingira*) and children inhabit this hut prior to their initiation into adulthood via circumcision (Kenyatta, 1968: 83-84). Secondly, *Nyumba* denotes the 'elementary [or nuclear-polygamous] family' in the Gikuyu community (Sicherman, 1990: 228). Thirdly, women are responsible for the thatching of huts. Charles A. Nama comments:

While building huts was the work of men, the women were charged with the responsibility of beautifying it with thatching...This symbolic completion of a Gikuyu homestead underscores the artistic prowess of Gikuyu women in enhancing the "beauty" of Gikuyu art forms. (1986: 140)

The burning of the hut by the homeguards constitutes an affront against both women's work under the sexual division of labour and women's mothering-function (the two forms of work are interrelated and should perhaps not be distinguished so easily from one another). These two forms of work are subsumed under the sign of a traditionalist/nationalist construction of Kenya as the 'House of Mumbi' (cf. Njama and Barnett, 1966: 182).

Michael Vaughan claims that Ngugi's attempt to represent the Gikuyu peasant community is derailed in A Grain of Wheat because

the novel places its emphasis upon individual consciousness and situates characters as heroes or martyrs:

Ngugi's tendency towards a Messianic mode of characterisation expresses a type of individualism that is, I think, typically petty-bourgeois. Its role is not so much historically illuminating as ideological. (1981: 27)

[Personal] experience, in Ngugi's novel, finds its ultimate rationale in certain timeless and essential attributes of human nature. Hence Ngugi's subject-matter is imperfectly rendered in social and historical terms. An ahistorical, individualist core of values, produced by a human nature at once guilty and redeemed, abased and heroic, resists the penetration of social and historical determinants. Instead of dialectics, we encounter utopian idealism and political pessimism. The novel falls apart, torn between social commitment and individualism. (1981: 45-46)

Vaughan locates the failure of Ngugi's political commitments in the author's representation of 'the home' as an apolitical institution and space. 'The home' thus becomes the site of harmonious prelapsarian social (and gender) relations and, I would add, the model for a post-Emergency utopia. My one important reservation regarding Vaughan's article is that it is something of an anomaly to speak of a communal consciousness (or, more precisely, class-consciousness) in the context of the Mau Mau insurgency, in either a 'fictive' or an 'historical' or even a 'critical' text. The guerillas did not operate with a unified set of aims or strategies. Their activities were often based upon random contiguities or contingencies. As a subaltern class, the Gikuyu peasantry, and the collective resistance to which it contributed, had not yet developed a class-consciousness. Spivak is explicit on this point:

Subalternity is not, after all and strictly speaking, a class-position; it is the detritus of colonialism, a dislocated ('cultural') idiom. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the rational Marxian subject is not discursively in tune with subalternity. (1995 (1992): 122)

By the same token, my reservation in regard to Vaughan's article does not provide justification for Ngugi's ideological refuge from the realm of the political in a discrete realm of the domestic. In the context of my criticism of A Grain of Wheat, Vaughan's argument provides a useful articulation of how the novel departs from Ngugi's stated political position. Further, it is Vaughan's astute reading of the category of 'the home' in Ngugi's text which I find particularly pertinent for a feminist criticism. If, at the most reductive level, Ngugi's fiction espouses an utopian rhetoric, rooted in the home and based upon male-female relations which are, on the face of it, free of ideological determinants - and if it is this utopian rhetoric which derails Ngugi's socio-political convictions - then this should alert the critic to the possibility that it is precisely Ngugi's phallogentric representations of the subaltern (crucial to his politics in a damning manner) which translate the impossibility of the novel's social vision.

All of the major characters experience a disparity between the 'discrete' categories of the domestic and the political, even though the task of reconstructing Kenya is rendered by the metaphor of the reconstruction of the homestead. Gatu's narrative makes this metaphor explicit:

'A certain man, the only son of his parents, once wanted a woman. And the woman also wanted to marry him and have children. But the man kept on putting off the marriage because he wanted to build a new hut so that the children would be born in a different hut. "We can build it together," she often told him. In the end, she was tired of waiting and letting life dry in her. She married another man. The first man went on trying to build the hut. It was never finished. Our people say that building a hut is a lifelong process. As a result the man never had a woman or children to continue his family fire." (96)

The new hut is a metaphor for a new Kenya. In terms of Gikuyu cultural codes, it is the gynaeceum. This passage, spoken by the most outspoken critic of British Imperialism in the novel, reveals that political dissent is informed by a desire for

mastery of the domestic; a mastery which entails Gikuyu male prerogatives in the homestead. The disembodied speech of the woman is necessarily ambiguous, given the allegorical equation between homestead and nation. Is her speech a plea for access to political decision-making and activism, or does this representation silence her by reverting to the hierarchies of culture/nature, head/body, intelligible/palpable? I would argue that the latter possibility is a more likely one, and that her speech is informed by a phallocratic investment, in which 'woman' forms part of the domestic economy as 'homemaker', while her man dominates the cultural outside.

Kihika leaves his lover, Wambuku, in order to engage in active resistance, but he is joined by Njeri in the forest. Njeri's 'passionate devotion' to her 'handsome warrior' (quoted above) implies that Kihika is as much an icon of potency as he is a figure of resistance. Of course, Kihika's phallic heroism enjoins the domestic with the political. The narrative accomplishes this ideological suturing by constructing a complex mythology, in which Kihika (as martyr) is the grain which must die in order that the fruits of his vision might be born. This is clearly also a copulative metaphor which recuperates the equation (established during the circumcision debate) between the body of 'woman' and the social composition of the state. However, the grain of wheat is also the bullet; instrumental to Mau Mau resistance - General R. states that bullets were called 'maize grains' in the forest (132).

It would be difficult to argue, as Kirsten Holst Peterson does, that A Grain of Wheat operates 'with complete political consciousness, coupled with revolutionary action' (*Birth Pangs of a National Consciousness: Mau Mau and Ngugi wa Thiong'o in World Literature Written in English*, v20(2), 218). Quite obviously, the implicit tensions between a Christian discourse (however revised it may be) and traditionalist/nationalist discourses (which are collapsed into one another despite the privilege immanent in the class-position of educated bourgeois

exponents of nationalism) preclude an oversimplified reading of Ngugi's political vision at this point in his development. However, the metaphor implicit in the title of Peterson's article suggests that one might talk of a disparate, but recuperable, patriarchal discourse underpinning the novel's historiography.

Nevertheless, A Grain of Wheat also exposes the inconsistency of an uterine textual organization. Mumbi's child unsettles Gikonyo's masculinity in a profound manner. The child is not subject to the patronymic and is therefore part of an Imaginary. It is the cause of Gikonyo's neurotic reaction to Mumbi, a reaction which leads to Mumbi leaving the household:

Previously, Gikonyo also treated the boy politely, showing neither resentment nor affection. For, as he argued in his heart, a child was a child and was not responsible for his birth. The boy had sensed a coldness and instinctively respected the distance. Today, however, he propped himself in between Gikonyo's knees, and started chattering, desiring to be friendly.

'Grandma has told me such a story - a good one - about - about - Do you know the one about the Irimu?' Gikonyo roughly pushed the boy away from the knees, disgust on his face. The boy staggered and fell on his back and burst into tears. (145-146)

Of course, Gikonyo knows the story all too well. The story of the *irimu* (an ogre) is one in which a 'girl' takes the wrong path in a forest and fails to keep an appointment with her lover (a warrior). The *irimu* captures her and wishes to eat her. She delays his advances by singing to him that she knows of a nicer place to be eaten. Eventually, her lover arrives and kills the ogre (cf. Okpewho, 1992: 219-220). Okpewho states that this story may have been influenced by the Mau Mau war. Gikonyo is, on one level, the Mau Mau warrior who makes love with Mumbi in the forest and who leaves her in order to fight in the forest. Karanja is the ogre who begets a son by Mumbi in his absence. The child is 'the son of an ogre' and Karanja's mother is named Wairimu (the son/daughter of an *irimu*). These metonymic associations conspire together in the child's 'innocent

intercourse'; provoking Gikonyo to respond irrationally. This textual moment constitutes a return of the repressed, as is evident in the imagery of flooding and overflow in Mumbi's speech:

'What sort of a man do you call yourself? Have you no manly courage to touch me? Why do turn your anger on a child, a little child...' She seethed like a river that has broken a dam. Words tossed out; they came in floods, filling her mouth so that she could hardly articulate them. (146)

Mumbi's voice is privileged at this point in the narrative as excess, an excess which unsettles the fixity of the Selfsame's *naming* of it-self. If the dialectically-structured desire which orders male and female subjectivities functions on the repression of one of the binates, then Mumbi's speech encapsulates the return which disrupts that economy. Equally, Wangari becomes directly involved in the conflict on Mumbi's behalf:

'This does not concern you, Mother!' [Gikonyo] said. 'Does not concern me?' She raised her voice, slapping her sides with both hands. 'Come all the earth and see what a son, my son, answers me. Does not concern me who brought you forth from these thighs? That the day should come - hah! - Touch her again if you call yourself a man!' (146)

Wangari's admonishment of Gikonyo causes him to leave the hut in defeat, and is thus a privileging of female speech over-against the male-dominated Symbolic. Her argument exposes the limits of a uterine social organization: if women are revered in Gikuyu society because of their ability to produce children - to become 'mothers of men' - at the expense of female desire (and, specifically, the clitoris), then Wangari points out the inconsistencies of Gikonyo's claim to proprietorship of Mumbi's propensity for child-bearing, by allowing that it does not matter who has fathered the child. Wangari thus silences the patriarchy by exposing the limits of a discourse which demarcates female subjectivity exclusively as a mothering function. Wangari and Mumbi forge a subaltern sisterhood which plays devil's advocate

to the patriarchal Law.

Further, despite the fact that 'woman' in A Grain of Wheat is an ideologically overdetermined sign, there is at least one way in which a subaltern historiography may be brought to bear on the text's narration of history. This entails 'reading against the grain' of A Grain of Wheat. Spivak's comments on reading against the grain of the Subaltern Studies group are useful here:

You can only read against the grain if misfits in the text signal the way. (These are sometimes called "moments of transgression.") (1987: 211)

Yet, since a "reading against the grain" must forever remain strategic, it can never claim to have established the authoritative truth of a text, it must forever remain dependent upon practical exigencies, never legitimately lead to a theoretical orthodoxy. (1987: 215)

Spivak's strategy of reading against the grain is gleaned from deconstruction. She acknowledges this political debt by quoting Derrida's Of Grammatology (1976: 24):

"Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work." (Spivak, 1987: 201)

Spivak asserts:

This is the greatest gift of deconstruction: to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him, persistently transforming situations of impossibility into possibility. (1987: 201)

I find this reading strategy particularly useful to my own analysis of Ngugi's novel; given that *Mau Mau* (but not the KLFA!) is merely a figment of colonial and bourgeois nationalist

discourse and that the subaltern insurgent only emerges as an obscured subjectivity - already submitted to the mechanics of representation - in narratives of *Mau Mau*. The feminist critic confronts a palimpsest when she attempts to address the subaltern (sexed) subject, and 'reading against the grain' enables her to submit the layers of interested representations of *Mau Mau* to a play of signification, even as the critic's own interlocution is rendered unstable by writing.

One of the signal misfits in A Grain of Wheat is that Mumbi's desire for Karanja, or her submission to him, remains largely unexplained, even when she 'reveals' her story during her confession to Mugo:

'[Karanja] came to where I was standing and showed me a long sheet of paper with government stamps. There was a list of names of those on their way back to the villages. Gikonyo's name was there.

'What else is there to tell you? That I remember being full of submissive gratitude? That I laughed - even welcomed Karanja's cold lips on my face? I was in a strange world, and it was like if I was mad. And need I tell you more?

'I let Karanja make love to me.' (131-132)

Mumbi's description of this incident admits of no political motive, gender-political interest, or desire. Indeed, the only statement she makes is that she 'let' Karanja have intercourse with her. This is consistent with the author's phallogocentric construction of female desire according to a model of lack. However, the privileged symbology of 'the grain of wheat' offers the critic a means of speaking both to Mumbi's desire and to her political investment. As I have argued, the 'grain' conflates the martyr (Kihika), his semen, his utopian vision, and the bullets used by the insurgents of which he is an eminent example: 'the grain' figures the narrative in a seminal way. If one were to read 'against the grain', a different story might emerge. If Mumbi were figured as one of the women who prostituted themselves to procure bullets for the Land and Freedom Army - martyring her desire to Karanja in favour of an anti-colonial political

interest - then one would be able to see her as an agent who contributes to the economy of significance in the novel, rather than being constructed and instrumentalized by that economy. Her political interest in, and contribution to, the struggle for Independence would subvert her positioning within the Gikuyu patriarchy because her child would be 'legitimized' even as it is not subject to the patronymic, and her desire would be 'legitimized' even as it feigns complicity with phallogentrism by bargaining into the gender-dialectic. The broader implication of this reading is that it reverses and displaces Ngugi's narrative by treating it as instrumental to *Mumbi's* subjectivity³. As such, this interested reading must work strategically within, and against, the dominant symbology in 'A Grain of Wheat' in order to disseminate the master-narrative's phallogic historiographic trajectory.

Chapter 6

History of a Bastard Child: paternity and illegitimacy in *Petals of Blood*

In *The Master's Dance to the Master's Voice*, Elleke Boehmer argues:

In *Petals of Blood*, once again, a woman is used as victim. As a thriving madam, obviously equipped with an extremely durable vagina, Wanja becomes a ready symbol for the ravaged state of Kenya. Yet her courage and resourcefulness in turning her exploitation as a woman and as a member of the oppressed classes to her advantage, is finally discredited. As Karega self-righteously makes explicit, thus laying down the male law, her struggle means very little because her method of resistance is simply to exploit in return. His final word is one of condemnation; no possibility of negotiation and certainly no expression of tenderness is permitted. (1991: 193)

Boehmer's criticism is insightful - Wanja is indeed a symbol of the ravaged state of neocolonial Kenya - but I would argue further that Wanja, who has had an illegitimate child by Kimeria Hawkins (who also represents the forces of neocolonial capital in the novel), embodies Kenyan history as a bastardized history, always bearing the inscription of the name of an illegitimate colonial or neocolonial father. Thus, Ngugi's interested narration of history is evidenced by the patriarchal construction of Wanja. Further, the name of the legitimate father, or the patronymic under which Ngugi's history is written, is the name of Gikuyu resistance; and in Wanja's case, it is Dedan Kimathi. Ngugi's narrative is Gikuyu-centric, even though he seems, in places, to be espousing a national socialist ideal. I view *Petals of Blood* as Ngugi's attempt to usurp a colonial/neocolonial/Imperial Symbolic Order (co-extensive with the English language and culture) by replacing it with an indigenous Symbolic Order (co-extensive with Gikuyu patriarchal discourses but not, at this point in Ngugi's development, entirely co-extensive with the Gikuyu language). Given Ngugi's

masculist historiography, History in the novel is contested by claims to a legitimate Law of resistance over against an illegitimate Law of domination. In an anti-colonial feminist reading, historiography in Petals of Blood is tantamount to claims of paternity. By reading these claims as paternal fictions, I argue that Ngugi's privileged production of the subaltern woman as mother/Kenya, and his subordinate production of the subaltern woman as a 'fallen woman'/prostituted economy, can be submitted to the undecidability of the paternal fiction by 'virtue' of Wanjia's fluctuating subject-positions of 'virgin', 'whore' and 'mother'.

Wanja and the Land

The novel's title, Petals of Blood, alludes to Derek Walcott's poem, *The Swamp*, used as an epigraph in the text. The epigraph warrants closer inspection:

Fearful, original sinuosities! Each mangrove sapling
Serpentlike, its roots obscene
As a six-fingered hand,

Conceals within its clutch the mossbacked toad
Toadstools, the potent ginger-lily,
Petals of blood,

The speckled vulva of the tiger-orchid;
Outlandish phalloi
Haunting the travellers of its one road.

The gender-framing of the epigraph is obvious enough, but what is more important for this analysis is the function of the epigraph as it informs Ngugi's historiography. The petals of blood imply both the Theng'eta plant and Wanjia, and the 'outlandish phalloi' which haunt the travellers in Ngugi's novel are the illegitimate colonial fathers of the Kenyan neocolonial élite. Crehan's perceptive article, *The Politics of the Signifier: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Petals of Blood*, makes a similar point:

An important episode in the main story is the rapid

transformation of Old Ilmorog into New Ilmorog, but a sense of reality is lost when its effect on individual lives is sentimentalized or melodramatized. Technological change, it is implied brings cultural and moral decline: where once there was the magic, spirit-releasing Theng'eta, made by loving hands and drunk at "beautiful" circumcision ceremonies, now there is only a mass-produced product whose consequences are drunkenness, degradation and industrial disputes. (1986: 4-5)

Very early in the narrative, while Ilmorog is in a state of drought, Njuguna's depiction makes the colonial influence on a gendered landscape clear:

The land seemed not to yield much and there was now no virgin soil to escape to as in those days before colonialism. (9)

Munira's representation also aligns women with the land:

[He] cherished and was often thrilled by the sight of women scratching the earth because they seemed to be at one with the green land. (24)

Munira stood up...For him Ilmorog without Wanja had been a land of drought. (83)

As I put pressure in the primus stove, I suddenly remembered, somehow or other [Karega's] words made me remember Old Mariamu [Karega's mother], as we used to call her. She was a muhoi on my father's land and we always thought of her as inseparable from the land. (47)

Before Munira sleeps with Wanja, he refers to the act with anticipation as 'my harvest' (66). It is also Munira who takes his pupils into the field, and discovers an outlandish phallus (a worm) in a flower with 'petals of blood' (21-22). The children ask Munira whether the eaten can eat back. Whereas Munira declines comment, Wanja's story of her decision to become a prostitute resonates with, or even answers, the children's question:

Kimeria, who had made his fortune as a Home Guard transporting bodies of Mau Mau killed by the British, was still prospering...Kimeria, who had ruined my life and later humiliated me by making me sleep with him during our journey to the city...This same Kimeria was one of those who would benefit from the new economic progress of Ilmorog...That's how one night I fully realised this law. Eat or be eaten. If you have a cunt - excuse my language but it seems the curse of Adam's Eve on those who are born with it - if you are born with this hole, instead of it being a source of pride, you are doomed to either marrying someone or else being a whore. You eat or you are eaten. (293: last ellipsis added)

While Karega's final response to Wanja's outlook is critical of her, he nevertheless reiterates the harvest imagery which has constructed Wanja ('the perfumed garden that was her body' (34)), Nyakinyua (who has sex with her husband in the millet fields), and the female peasantry in general:

[We] shall no longer let others reap where they never planted, harvest where they never cultivated... (326)

Further, Karega's reminiscences after having sex with Wanja construct her as part of the land:

So many experiences, so many discoveries in a night and a half. Harvest-time for seeds planted in time past. The exhaustion of the body. But he is light, buoyant within. (234)

Harvesting in Petals of Blood encodes male virility and paternity. This is demonstrated in the description of the antelope at harvest-time in Ilmorog:

Sometimes the male would run after a young female, giving it no rest or time to eat, expecting another kind of harvest. (203-204)

Circumcision occurs after the harvest, and the speech of the male characters reiterates the association between Theng'eta, harvest and birth:

'[Theng'eta] must be ready on the day of circumcision. When the elders are having their Njohi [beer] we too can join them with our Theng'eta.'

'Why not? To celebrate! To say farewell to a season of drought,' said Karega with boyish enthusiasm. 'To celebrate a big harvest.'

'Farewell to the drought in our lives,' added Abdullah.

'And for more sperms of God [rain] to fertilise the earth,' Munira said. (205)

The importance of Theng'eta, of its petals of blood, to Ngugi's narrative, is that it encodes the fertility of Gikuyu female subjects, marriage and circumcision - the very fabric of traditional Gikuyu communal cohesion which establishes the patriarchal Law. Further, Theng'eta encodes the *itwika* ceremony and Gikuyu resistance to colonial structures of dominance (204-205). In other words, the rite of Theng'eta drinking, in its traditional context at least, is imbricated in the subjection of, and the very constitution of, the Gikuyu subaltern as sexed subject. Nyakinyua's discourse locates resistance to colonialism within the ambit of circumcision:

She sang of other struggles, of other wars - the arrival of colonialism and the fierce struggles waged against it by newly circumcised youth. Yes, it was always the duty of the youth to drive out foreigners and enemies lodged amongst the people: it was always the duty of the youth to fight all the Marimus, all the two-mouthed Ogres, and that was the meaning of the blood shed at circumcision. (210)

This passage anticipates Ngugi's use of the ogre myth in Devil on the Cross and Matigari, and the ogre, like the 'monster-god' to which the lawyer refers (163-164) is a symbol which naturalizes Ngugi's 'conception' of the representatives of neo-colonial 'corporate' capital. I will be dealing with the gender-ideological determinants which inform Ngugi's use of the myth in my final chapter. What is more important to note here, is that circumcision is the means by which traditional Gikuyu history is narrativized (see Sicherman 1990: 236-239, for a detailed explanation of the names of the age sets).

Abdulla's remembrances go so far as to suggest that resistance to structures of domination is the defining instance of circumcision, and therefore, of manhood:

He had indeed endured thirst and hunger, briars and thorns in scaly flesh in the service of that vision which first opened out to him the day he had taken both the oath of unity and the Batuni oath...How he trembled as the vision opened out, embracing new thoughts, new desires, new possibilities! To redeem the land: to fight so that the industries like the shoe-factory which had swallowed his sweat could belong to the people: so that his children could one day have enough to eat and to wear under adequate shelter from rain: so that they would say in pride, my father died that I might live: this had transformed him from a slave before a boss into a man. That was the day of his true circumcision into a man. (136)

Aside from the fact that the Batuni oath produced the Kenyan subaltern woman as the palpable body which opened out to receive the penises of the initiates (with which I have dealt in my fourth chapter), and aside from Abdulla's framing of resistance within a discourse of the familial (a discourse in which Ngugi's production of female subjectivities is overdetermined), Abdulla's equation of resistance with circumcision and manhood is important to a reading of the novel. Abdulla's release from incarceration, after the Mau Mau insurgency has ended, depicts the teleology of gender-determinism towards which Ngugi's representation of history as resistance/circumcision contributes:

'...If only Nding'uri and Ole Masai and all the others were here to see this! The flowering of faith...the crowning glory to a collective struggle and endurance...' (253, second ellipsis in the original)

Wanja's 'redemption' from life as a barmaid/prostitute (a deflowered woman) and the recuperation of her errant desire for a patriarchal construction of motherhood are implied by the imagery of flowering:

Since she left Ilmorog she had two humiliating and shameful experiences. She would now break with that

past and make something of herself in Ilmorog. As an evidence of her cleansed spirit, she resolved that she would not again obey the power of her body over men; that any involvement was out until she had defeated the past through a new flowering of self. (107)

The two 'humiliating' experiences to which Wanja refers are her failed relationship with a truck driver client, and the incident in which a German national attempts to drug her in order to export her to Europe for resale as a prostitute¹. In other words, the past with which Wanja wishes to break, and the past which Ngugi represents in his later fiction, is that of Kenya as a prostituted economy. 'Defeating' the past in Petals of Blood, and in Devil on the Cross, is co-extensive with the production of 'woman' as the mother of a Kenyan utopia.

Circumcision as History

Munira remembers his time at Siriana:

Siriana, you should have been there in our time, before and during the period of the big, costly European dance of death and even after: you might say that our petty lives and their fears and crises took place against a background of tremendous changes and troubles, as can be seen by the names given to the age-sets between Nyabani and Hitira: Mwomboko...Karanji, Boti, Ngunga, Muthuu, Ng'aragu Ya Mianga, Bamiti, Gicina Bangi, Cugini-Mburaki. (27)

Many of these names carry the inscription of a colonial father: for example, Hitira (Hitler), Boti (Forty), Bamiti (Permit). Sicherman (1990: 236-239) provides a more extensive list of examples. In a sense then, Munira is relating a mythical prelapsarian past which has been bastardized by the advent of colonialism. It should be remembered that the names given to the circumcision age-sets were the means by which the Gikuyu community remembered its history, and that the names were given annually, after the harvest, so that Gikuyu history was seasonal and cyclical. Karega recalls Nyakinyua's story about Ndemi ('the founding patriarch' of Ilmorog (120)) in Wanja's presence:

'It must be true. Why not? If not the details, then at least the idea.'

'What idea?'

'Of a past. A great past. A past when Ilmorog, or all of Africa, controlled its own earth.' (125)

Quite clearly, Ngugi is not advocating a wholesale return to an illustrious pre-History, although he does privilege an idyllic and unitary 'conception' of pre-History above the Western ideal of a linear history. This may be seen in the peculiar tension which obtains between the clergyman who teaches at Siriana, Hallows Ironmonger (28), and the mysterious traditional healer, Mwathi wa Mugo, who manufactures iron implements, and requires secrecy in order to be protected from 'the power of evil and envious eyes' (17). Mwathi's 'real' identity is that of Muturi, an elder peasant, whose name denotes 'smith'. While Western christology is not privileged in Petals of Blood, traditional belief systems are not accepted uncritically either. Karega is setting his notion of an idyllic past over against the name of an illegitimate father:

'It is not that I don't believe in names. For what could be a more ridiculous caricature of self than those of our African brothers and sisters proudly calling themselves James Phillipson, Rispa, Hotensiah, Ron Rodgerson, Richard Glucose, Charity, Honey Moonsnow, Ezekiel, Shiprah, Winterbottomson - all the collection of names and non-names from the Western world?...It is rather that I believe in the reality of what's being named than the name itself.' (125)

What, then, is the 'reality' which is named in the narrative of Ndemi, or in Karega's moniker, or even in the name of Dedan Kimathi? In other words, who is the legitimate father in Petals of Blood? It is not 'Gikuyu', father deity of the Gikuyu community and Name of the Father in the Gikuyu language: the narrative breaks with Gikuyu traditional belief systems when the townsfolk journey to Nairobi (upon Karega's suggestion) to meet with their Member of Parliament, Nderi wa Riera (vulture of the air; Sicherman, 1990: 224), instead of sacrificing Abdulla's donkey in accordance with Mwathi Wa Mugo's/Muturi's prescriptions

for the alleviation of the drought. I will hold the answer to these questions in abeyance for the present.

However, I would suggest that we need, at this juncture, to consider the importance with which circumcision is invested in the novel. Nderi wa Riera tells the delegation:

'I used to be called David Samuel. But I asked myself: why should we abandon our names for these foreign ones? Ha! ha! ha! I know a friend, black as the soot on a cooking pot, who calls himself Winterbottom. Ha! ha! ha!'

'These Europeans made us give up many beautiful customs. And I am not only speaking about circumcision,' said Njuguna. (177)

The link between circumcision and the Name of the Father is established by this passage, although Njuguna's subsequent impression of Nderi as a 'sensible man' shows that the two are speaking at cross-purposes.

Further, while the Ilmorog villagers are travelling to Nairobi to meet Nderi, they overhear one of the songs from the ritual being sung, out of context, by the Kenyan élite, at (Raymond) Chui's (leopard; Sicherman, 1990: 198) house (149-151). Munira relates the incident to the lawyer:

'What I could not understand was their obvious competition to say the most shocking words. In the old days, I am told, the songs and the words and everything were in their place - singers talked to one another, abused one another, even, but there was dignity in the whole thing. When I was young I used to hide from home to attend circumcision festivals.' (162)

Nderi wa Riera suggests to the villagers that they should raise funds in order to alleviate the plight of Ilmorog as an underdeveloped and drought-stricken locale:

'Get also a group of singers and dancers - those who know traditional songs. Gitiro ['preparatory to a wedding', 202], Muthuu ['performed by boys before

circumcision', 222], Ndumo ['general term for women's songs and dances', 224], Mumburo ['performed by boys four months before their initiation', 220], Muthungucu [dance for...old men and women', 221], Mwomboko ['modern Gikuyu dance', 223] - things like that. Our culture, our African culture and spiritual values, should form the true foundation for this nation. We need to send a strong representative delegation to Gatundu [home of Kenyatta]!'...

'To drink more tea - Gachai [little tea]!' somebody shouted. (182, [quotations from Sicherman, 1990])

The villagers' dissent at this suggestion is manifest, but their reasons are not. The 'little tea' which Munira, amongst others, has been forced to take is the KCO oath pledging unity to the President and the nation, and this oath is a perversion of the Mau Mau oath of allegiance (which was originally administered under the subversively euphemistic guise of 'tea-drinking'). Nderi's suggestion encodes the performance of circumcision or marriage rights in the name of an illegitimate father - KANU. Over against these illegitimate ceremonies, the narrative posits the circumcision rites in their originary 'native' (natal) context (206-210), in which the villagers, led by Nyakinyua, Njuguna and Abdulla, perform the songs as the very principle of communal unity.

In Petals of Blood, circumcision is tantamount to a people's history of resistance:

No group now carried a name as memorial to the famine of England, so called, because it had weakened people's resistance to the European marauders of the people's land and sweat. The famine of cassava itself was a bitter funeral dirge to their sons lost [in World War 2], thus prompting the young to sing:

When I came from Japan
Little did I know
I would give birth
To a stillborn child
Flour of cassava.

Thus history and legend showed that Ilmorog had always been threatened by the twin cruelties of unprepared-for vagaries of nature and the uncontrolled actions of men. (111)

It is significant that the song should link the widespread drought and the loss of lives with the Gikuyu subaltern woman's mothering-function. Female circumcision - which enacts a displaced male fear of castration and produces woman as lack in order to re-produce her as a 'mother of men' - consists in inscribing 'woman' with the Name of the Father; a name which equals history itself.

Wanja as 'Volkswagen' (Folkwagon)

The subject-positions assigned to Wanja fluctuate between two poles: Virgin and Whore. Munira's account is important in this regard:

Munira felt her even more remote: as if he had never touched her: her taunt had the same alluring power as the beckoning coquetry of a virgin: he could touch her only by deflowering her by force and so himself flowering in blood. Why couldn't she carry an interesting label on her back: Drive a VW: Ride a Virgin Whore. Or VIP: Very Interesting Prostitute.
(76)

This passage occurs after Wanja complains to Abdulla that she would earn more as a prostitute than as an assistant in his shop. What I find interesting is the imagery of flowering in blood/deflowering. It naturalizes the association between Wanja and the land. Further, it is Kimeria who has initially deflowered Wanja, and Kimeria is one of the representatives of the capital which buys Wanja's Theng'eta enterprise, effectively prostituting the custom of Theng'eta drinking. Once Nyakinyua and the other peasants have had their link with the land severed by the repossession of their mortgaged land, Wanja once more becomes a prostitute, this time in order to support herself. The Blake epigraph which precedes the section of the narrative in which Ilmorog develops, recalls another eminent VW; the Mary of christology:

The morning blush'd fiery red:
Mary was found in an adulterous bed;

Earth groaned beneath, and heaven above
Trembled at discovery of love. (189)

Mary is both virgin mother and whore in the christological narrative, and Wanja likewise vacillates between the two poles of femininity ascribed to the Gikuyu subaltern woman by Ngugi's patriarchal affiliations with both christology and Gikuyu traditionalist/nationalist discourse. Wanja's return to the status of virgin occurs after each of the three purifying/cathartic fires. The narrative offers Wanja an alternative to the virgin/whore dichotomy:

She was somehow sure of her power over men: she knew how they could be very weak before her body. Sometimes she was very afraid of this power and she often wanted to run away from bar kingdoms...She wandered from place to place in search of it or for a man who could show her it. And then she thought she knew. A child. Yes. A child. That is what her body really cried for. (57, Ngugi's emphasis)

As in Ngugi's subsequent novels, Devil on the Cross and Matigari, the prostitution performed by Gikuyu women is ascribed to a colonial influence. For example, Kimeria Hawkins, who betrays Nding'uri (Karega's brother and Abdulla's comrade) and impregnates the younger Wanja, is recalled in this way by Abdulla:

[We] were going to meet a man, our man, who had some shadowy connections with the colonial police and used to get bullets from them and in exchange, according to him, he would bring them juicy women. (221)

It is interesting that Ngugi should elide the agency in insurgency of the Nairobi prostitutes to whom he is referring by regulating their subversive exchanges through a male character, and especially a character who is elsewhere depicted as counter-revolutionary. This passage goes a long way towards demonstrating that Ngugi's historiographic narrative represents history as a transaction between men, and that female agency in insurgency is strategically omitted from Ngugi's novels. 'Woman', the Gikuyu

subaltern as sexed subject, is transacted, effacing her own historical agency. Further, Kimeria betrays Nding'uri because Nding'uri is sexually-involved with Kimeria's sister. Nding'uri's speech, narrated by Abdulla, locates 'woman' as the terrain over which history is contested:

Suddenly he stopped in the middle of the road and thrust his fingers shaped like a revolver, towards me. "Stop, halt, you drinkers of blood!...Why do you oppress black people? Why do you take our land? Why do you take our sweat and ruin our women? Johnnie boys, red men, say your last prayers to your gods...No answer? Guilty...Trrro-Trrro-Trrroooo..." the pistol was now a machine gun in his eager hands and he was actually sweating. (222, first ellipsis mine)

Nding'uri, whose name denotes 'one who possesses courage or strength' (Sicherman, 1990, 224), is ubiquitously privileged in the novel, and his courage presumably extends to his ability to rape women: he and Abdulla 'share' a woman, despite her unwillingness, and wonder if she, 'now a happily married mother of two, even remembered that night' (222). The implication in Abdulla's reminiscences is that it is perfectly acceptable for rape to be the testing-ground for virile heroes, because these women are so contented with their lot once they have become married mothers that they have also become amnesiacs.

The amnesiac is a subject without a history, and amnesiac motherhood, of course, is the alternative offered to Wanja at the conclusion of the narrative (she remembers Kimathi as the father of her child). During Nding'uri's visitation upon Karega (as a ghost), Karega is surprised that Nding'uri knows him, given that he might not yet have been born while Nding'uri was alive. Nding'uri answers:

'Seedlings from the same womb. Kinsmen. Mumbi's children. Nyumba ya Mumbi [House of Mumbi]. It does matter, or is it not so?'

'Why are you adrift on a raft?'...

'...Tell me one black man who is not adrift even in the land of his birth. But you? For a second I thought I knew you. Listen, my brothers, the true house of

Mumbi, Mumbi the mother creator, is all the black toiling masses carrying a jembe in one hand and three bullets in the other, struggling against centuries of drifting, sole witnesses of their own homecoming. That is why in 1952 we took the oath.' (237)²

Nding'uri's use of the word 'brothers' includes Karega in a familial framework of reference that extends to all of Africa. Like Wanja then, Mumbi is equipped with an exceptionally durable vagina, as were the Gikuyu women indentured to receive the penises of male insurgents who took the Batuni oath during the Mau Mau insurgency. Clearly, Nding'uri's words privilege the mothering-function of the subaltern woman - encoded in the term *Nyumba ya Mumbi* ('House of Mumbi', implying both Kenya and the gynaeceum) - over the propensity of the subaltern woman to use her womb for other forms of production, such as prostitution.

The neocolony thus becomes representable as a prostituted economy in Ngugi's later fiction for the reason that prostitution is one of the forms of sex-work which does not enable resistance to be narrativized as virility. Shortly after Nding'uri's visitation, Karega rebukes Munira for calling Wanja a prostitute:

We are all prostitutes, for in a world of grab and take, in a world built on a structure of inequality and injustice, in a world where some can eat while others can only toil...yes, in a world where a man who has never set foot on this land can sit in a New York or London office and determine what I shall eat, read, think, do, only because he sits on a heap of billions taken from the world's poor, in such a world, we are all prostituted. (240)

Nevertheless, Karega finally condemns Wanja for her choice to resume work as a prostitute - a choice which renders her complicit with the forces of neocolonial capital:

For what was the point of a world in which one could only be clean by wiping his dirt and shit and urine on others?...A world in which one could only be saintly and moral and upright by prostituting others? (303)

Karega prefers:

...a more humane world in which the inherited inventive genius of man in culture and science from all ages and climes would not be the monopoly of a few, but for the use of all, so that all flowers in all their different colours would ripen and bear fruits and seeds. And the seeds would be put into the ground and they would once again sprout and flower in rain and sunshine. (303)

Karega's preferred vision is one in which the land is invested with seed and 'women' are mothers, inseminated by the heroes of Kenyan resistance (for instance, Kimathi). However, Karega's vision does admit of a hybrid paternity if it is read in the context of Ngugi's similar wording in the concluding paragraph of his essay, *Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom: the wealth of a common global culture*, collected in Moving the Centre:

The wealth of a global culture will then be expressed in the particularities of our different languages and cultures very much like a universal garden of many-coloured flowers. The 'floweriness' of the different flowers is expressed in their very diversity. But there is cross-fertilisation between them. And what is more they all contain in themselves the seeds of a new tomorrow. (1993: 24)

This passage includes the very possibility of hybridity which informed the Imperialist desire to assign the African the place of demi-human, and produced the 'learned' (or interested) discourses on the possibility or impossibility of miscegenation; discourses which concluded that cross-fertilization between Europeans and Africans would produce degenerate races. In other words, Karega, read in accordance with Ngugi's globalizing vision implies the 'bastardizing' influence of an hegemonic Imperial language and culture.

Munira's experience, like Karega's, renders the neocolony as a prostituted economy after he has procured sex from Wanja:

It was New Kenya. It was New Ilmorog. Nothing was free. But for a long time, for years to come, he was not to forget the shock and the humiliation of the hour. It was almost like that first time, long ago, when he was only a boy. (280)

Munira's memories are of Amina ('Amen/so be it'; Meyer, 1991: 61), a prostitute to whom he loses his virginity, and whom he attempts to forget by burning a matchbox effigy of her hut. These memories prefigure Munira's torching of Wanja's whorehouse in order to save Karega in accordance with his christological apocalyptic/redemptive vision.

Nderi wa Riera, as a Member of Parliament in the neocolony, is represented as complicit with the economy which prostitutes African women:

Riera had gone to Mombasa for a business inspection and on-the-spot investigation of two tourist resorts which had been mentioned in a foreign newspaper as 'special places where even an ageing European could buy an authentic African virgin girl of fourteen or fifteen for the price of a ticket to a cheap cinema show'. (175)

Wanja is redeemed for Ngugi's narrative by the fact that she is an 'unfulfilled woman' (196) and that her fulfilment resides in becoming a mother (151). Munira's interior monologue points, quite crucially I think, to insemination as tantamount to History, specifically the History of resistance:

He was an outsider, he had always been an outsider, a spectator of life, history. He wanted to say: Wanja! give me another night of the big moon in a hut and through you, buried in you, I will be reborn into history, a player, an actor, a creator, not this, this disconnection. (217)

This passage is not altogether different from Karega's reminiscence of sex with Wanja as 'gradually working together in rhythmic search for a lost kingdom, for a lost innocence and hope' (230), in which sex translates the path back to an idyllic

past, or towards an utopian future. Shortly after Karega and Wanja have intercourse, the community narrates:

These days Karega was to be seen mostly with Wanja: what had happened between him and the teacher?...But we were soon intrigued, fascinated, moved by the entwinement and flowering of youthful love and life and we whispered: see the wonder-gift of God. Crops will sprout luxuriant and green. We shall eat our fill and drink Theng'eta at harvest time. (243)

Munira reiterates the association between Wanja and the land:

...I watched her undergo yet another change. It was a new, youthful, life-full, luscious growth after the rains...Their love seemed to grow with the rains. (244)

In addition, Wanja defends Karega against Munira:

'...He has reawakened my smothered woman-ness, my girlhood, and I feel I am about to flower...' (251)

The mothering-function of the Gikuyu subaltern as sexed subject thus translates male resistance as virility, as well as an alternative to the neocolony as an economy prostituted by the Imperial incursion. However, the mothering-function in all of Ngugi's texts is a construction which dissimulates a privileged masculist historiography. This historiography institutes male prerogatives in order to efface the historical agency and silence the gender-political voice of the Gikuyu subaltern woman, by producing her as a lack which is inseminated by the Word of the father. The father is named, in turn, as His-story by that insemination. Nyakinyua, who is represented positively throughout Petals of Blood as the repository of Gikuyu tradition, myth and communal values, is also, therefore, a 'mother of men' (123). This lends credence to Eustace Palmer's unexamined turn of phrase: that Nyakinyua is the 'embodiment' of these values (1979: 157-158).

Allusions to the Name of an Illegitimate Father

I would contend that there are a number of illegitimate fathers/children in Petals of Blood. Central to my argument is the notion that the allusions which comprise the novel's historical/textual/intertextual weave may be read as citations or signatures of illegitimate fathers. I am working within a deconstructive framework here: Spivak notes that '[quotation] in Derrida is a mark of non-self-identity: the defining predication of a woman, whose very name is changeable' (1983: 171).

Let us begin with a 'woman' who is named Wanjia (or is she?). Wanjia places notices in Abdulla's shop, first to count the stock in the shop, then to advertise that the shop is open and finally, to advertise a 'PERMANENT CLOSING DOWN SCALE' (55). These efforts at attracting customers are partly successful. However, at this narrative juncture, Wanjia is strikingly similar to Leila, Ramlogan's daughter and Ganesh's future wife in V.S. Naipaul's The Mystic Masseur, who places a notice in the window of her father's shop: 'NOTICE, IS. HEREBY; PROVIDED: THAT, SEATS! ARE, PROVIDED. FOR; FEMALE: SHOP, ASSISTANTS!' (1957: 43-44). If The Mystic Masseur is included in the allusive framework of Petals of Blood, then Munira corresponds with Ganesh (a teacher) and Nyakinyua ('who shat a mountain', 4) corresponds with Ganesh's aunt, The Great Belcher. Further, it is quite possible that Karega's vision of Nding'uri (237, quoted above (146)) is informed by Naipaul's novel, The Mimic Men. In Homecoming, Ngugi writes 'the image of the shipwreck - 'this feeling of being adrift' - stands astride [Naipaul's] novel, a colossus of loneliness amidst disorder' (91).

Equally, the epigraphs in Petals of Blood, from Walcott, Blake, Song of Solomon, the Book of Revelation, Whitman, Cabral, are, in my analysis, signatures of illegitimate fathers which, in certain cases, contribute a seditious narrative element to Petals of Blood. This seditious element consists in Ngugi's use of marginal (non) Western literatures in an African text; a project which is consonant with Ngugi's stated disavowal of Eurocentric, Imperialist and christological master-texts.

Nevertheless, there is significant blindness in Petals of Blood - a novel which interrogates the unexamined adoption of Western standards and ideals into an African context. Part of the interrogation consists in a critique of naming and a critique by naming: Kimeria wa Kamia Nja/Kimeria Hawkins/'hawk that swallows' (Sicherman, 1990:209), Raymond Chui/Chui Rimui ('chui' denotes 'leopard'; Sicherman, 1990: 198), David Samuel/Nderi wa Riera ('vulture of the air', Sicherman, 1990: 224), Mzigo ('a burden'; Curtis, 1984: 205), Cambridge 'Fraud-sham', Reverend Hallows Ironmonger, Julia/Wanjiru ('the black one'; Meyer, 1990: 94), Ezekieli/Waweru, Reverend Kamau/Reverend Jerrod Brown. It is obvious enough that the English names parody the name(s) of the colonial father. What is less obvious is that Ngugi ideologically forecloses the possibility of hybridity which the form of an intertextual 'Petals of Blood' admits.

Yet, even the names of certain privileged characters in the novel admit the possibility of hybrid subjectivities, and therefore, of illegitimate paternity. Significantly, both Karega and Joseph are born out of wedlock, and Abdulla states that Joseph is '[not] my brother. He is more of a son to me' (285). In discussion with Wanja and Karega, Abdulla reveals his own hybrid identity:

'Karega....' [Wanja] said aloud. 'What a funny name!' 'Ritwa ni mbukio [Ritwa resembles the person he's named after],' Karega quoted the proverb. 'Somebody a long time ago asked the question: What's in a name? And he answered that a rose would still be a rose even by another name.'....
'Names are actually funny. My real name is not Abdulla. It is Murira. But I baptised myself Abdulla. Now everybody calls me Abdulla.'
'You mean, you thought Abdulla was a Christian name?' Wanja asked. (61)

Abdulla's hybrid name passes as a mistake, presumably because it subverts the christological patronymic, and because it encodes the name of the Kenyan poet, Abdullatif Abdulla, who was sentenced to three years imprisonment in 1969, for publishing a pamphlet entitled *Kenya, Where Are We Heading?* (Ngugi, 1993: 94).

The passage I have quoted thus becomes an interested silencing of the struggles of Indian or Muslim Kenyans against common structures of neocolonial subjection. Equally, Ole Masai, Abdullah's comrade in Mau Mau (and propered by the Gikuyu name 'Muhindi', 137), is the son of Njogu's daughter and Dharamshah, who occupied the shop prior to Abdulla's arrival. Ole Masai hates 'himself, his mother, his father, his divided self' (137). His name denotes 'the son of a Masai' (Sicherman, 1990: 228) and his character is:

...possibly based in part on Joseph Murumbi (who is half-Masai, half-Goan), a KAU activist educated in India [and the] first vice-president of Kenya... (Sicherman, 1990: 152)

Where, then, should we locate Ole Masai's patronymic: is it Dharamshah, Murumbi, or given by Masai man, a Goan man, his comrades amongst the Mau Mau insurgents? Equally, why should Ole Masai hate his 'divided self' when Ngugi's narrative includes the patronymic of Abullatif Abdulla and is inseminated by the words of V.S. Naipaul? The answer, I think, lies in Ngugi's representation of a Gikuyu-centric, male-sexed historiographic narrative, which forecloses the possibilities of marketable intercourse (prostitution) and hybridity (illegitimate paternity). To Ngugi's credit, he is perhaps attempting to avoid entanglement in the discourses on the (im)possibility of hybridity which informed Imperialist constructions of race. However, I will argue presently that it is precisely these representations that also work against Ngugi's narrativization of history.

Nyakinyua's name, for instance, denotes:

"a woman whose children have taken circumcision" ...Women of this age group were used widely by Gikuyu politicians, including Kenyatta, as praise-singers, composing lyrics to Ndumo tunes celebrating their heroes...Those surviving today - and there are many - sing the praises of the present leadership and their policies; Ngugi's character Nyakinyua in *Petals* thus runs contrary to her group. (Sicherman, 1990: 227)

In my reading, in order for Nyakinyua to be an exception, she must also encode the rule. In a certain sense, 'Nyakinyua' is named by an illegitimate neocolonial father; the ruling party in Kenya, KANU. Equally, Godfrey Munira confesses to a functionary of the neocolonial law, Inspector Godfrey, who is marked by the signifier of the proper and who should be read, I contend, as an avatar of Godfrey (Munira), whose act of arson is 'improper' in terms of that law.

The Paternal Fiction: the name which might (never) have been

In Moses and Monotheism, Freud argues that the turning from a matriarchal order to a patriarchal order is a monumental development in the advancement of culture:

This turning from the mother to the father, however, signifies above all a victory of spirituality over the senses - that is to say, a step forward in culture, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a surmise based on a deduction and a premiss. (153)

Cixous has the following rejoinder to Freud's masculist narrative:

What is a father? "Fatherhood is a legal fiction," said Joyce. Paternity, which is a fiction, is fiction passing itself off as truth. Paternity is the lack of being which is called God. Men's cleverness was in passing themselves off as fathers and "repatriating" women's fruits as their own. A naming trick. Magic of absence. God is men's secret. (1986: 101)

The patronymic then, the paternal fiction, reconstructs the patriarchal edifice through the signification which constitutes the Proper Name as Law; the Name of the Proper. In this fictional manoeuvre, a ruse posits fixity over the undecidable and legislates the imperatives of a privileged male physiology. Regarding the legislated properties of the Selfsame, Spivak asserts:

The difference in the woman's body [is] that it exists too much, as the place of evidence, of the law as writing...I am speaking in the narrow sense, of the law as code of legitimacy and inheritance. One version of this "simple" law is written on the woman's body as an historical instrument of reproduction. A woman has no need to "prove" maternity. The institution of phallogocentric law is congruent with the need to prove paternity and authority, to secure property by transforming the woman into a mediating instrument of the production and passage of property. (1983: 184)

One of the important implications of this passage for my reading of Petals of Blood, is that it enables me to interrogate both the posited father (Kimathi) and the deducible father (Abdulla) of Wanjia's unborn child at the conclusion of the novel. The difference between the two fathers is recuperable for the Gikuyu patriarchy when one considers that this difference constitutes legitimate paternity (Lawfully) by representing paternity as the mark (or signature) of virility in the name of resistance. By bringing the paternal fiction in the narrative into crisis, one might begin to interrogate the ortho-historical (or auto-historical) meta-narrative it sets in place as the historico-cultural rank of the physiological father.

I find in the younger Wanjia, impregnated by Kimeria Hawkins/Kimeria wa Kamia Nja (317), an outlaw woman, rather than the narrative's sentimental construction of a 'fallen' waif who discards her child in a latrine and who languishes in 'unfulfilled motherhood'. Kimeria's patronymic, which would, under lawful 'circumstantials', have named the child and Wanjia the mother, is 'wa Kamia Nja' (denoting 'son of the one who shits outside'; Meyer, 1991: 101). Ngugi is equating Kimeria's patronymic with excrement and alimentary/visceral consumption, as he does with a number of the patronymics of the neocolonial 'ogres' in his subsequent novel, Devil on the Cross (and even in the name of Sir Swallow Bloodall in Petals of Blood). Wanjia, however, 'throws the baby out with the bathwater', and returns it to shit (Kamia). By discarding her child in the latrine, Wanjia restores her own name; a name which is not a Proper Name, or the

Name of the Proper, but an unnameable impropriety. Wanja (denoting 'the girl [or] someone who used to sit on the outside of her living house, the outsider'; Meyer, 1991: 34) restores 'wa Kamia Nja' to WA(kamia)NJA. Incidentally, the living house outside of which Wanja as prostitute sits is the gynaeceum - the House of Mumbi - the ideologically overdetermined subject-position of motherhood/Kenya of which Ngugi's narratives are so accommodating.

What are we to make of Wanja's subsequent pregnancy, and of the patronymic assigned to it - that of 'Dedan Kimathi'? Or, to return to my earlier question, what is the 'reality' named by 'Karega', 'Ndemi' or 'Dedan Kimathi'? The answer to these questions may be found by asking why Wanja names Kimathi as the father of her child in the following passage:

'I think...I am...I think I am with child. No I am sure of it, mother.'

Her mother was silent for a few seconds.

'Whose...whose child?'

Wanja got a piece of charcoal and a piece of cardboard. For one hour or so she remained completely absorbed in her sketching. And suddenly she felt lifted out of her own self, she felt waves of emotion she had never before experienced. The figure began to take shape on the board. It was a combination of the sculpture she once saw at the lawyer's place and images of Kimathi in his moments of triumph and laughter and sorrow and terror - but without one limb. When it was over, she felt a tremendous calm, a kind of inner assurance of the possibilities of a new kind of power. She handed the picture to her mother.

'Who...is this...with...with so much pain and suffering on his face? And why is he laughing at the same time?' (338)

The words which begin this passage reveal one of the definitive predications of 'woman' in Ngugi's texts - that of the subordinated term in the intelligible/palpable hierarchy of desire. More importantly, the implied father is Abdulla (who has an amputated leg), but the posited father is Kimathi. Wanja's gesture - and it is just that, because 'she' can not Name the Law from the place of castration to which it readily admits (her) -

might at first be seen as self-affirming, but it is too easily recuperable into the narrative of the potency which constructs Ngugi's representation of Gikuyu male resistance. In other words, the paternal fiction that operates here is an interested fiction. Quite clearly, Kimathi could not be the 'real' father - he is dead - despite the monumental virility accorded to Ngugi's heroes. Perhaps the father is, after all, Abdulla, who has fought alongside Kimathi and is possibly of his age-set. Abdulla shoots antelope with a catapult in order to feed the villagers on their journey to Nairobi, and the significance of this event is not lost on Njuguna ('the common man'; Meyer, 1991: 34), who teases Nyakinyua that antelopes are supposed by Gikuyu custom to be 'women's goats which had run wild because the women could not look after them' (139). This allusion ushers in the reconstruction of the primal scene of the Gikuyu patriarchy, in which men, knowing women to be weak, inseminated them and overthrew the matriarchy. We do also know of Abdulla that 'he took her, and she did not resist' (314), since mastery and resistance are exclusively within the province of male subjects in Ngugi's historiography. And it is precisely this historiography, this 'reality' of a name, to which I now turn.

If one were to seek the Name of the Father in Petals of Blood, the best place to begin looking would be in the mythological figure of Ndemi, 'the founding patriarch', whose name denotes 'cut' (Kenyatta, 1968: 187) - the castration which produces the cultural clearing. According to Gikuyu myth, a harsh king called Gikuyu refused to permit his nomadic people to settle and cultivate the land. The *iregi* age-set (derived from *rega*, denoting 'to refuse or revolt'; Kenyatta, 1968: 186) overthrew Gikuyu, and the *ndemi* age-set which followed cleared the land of forests in order that the people might cultivate their crops. Out of this revolution, the custom of *itwika* developed, in which a peaceful transfer of power from one generation (age-set) to the next, approximately every 30 years, ensured a 'democratic' (in Kenyatta's term) system of government (see Kenyatta, 1968: 187-197 and Sicherman, 1990: 166-167). The last *itwika* was held

between 1890-1898, the successive *itwika* (scheduled for 1925-1928) was banned by the colonial government, thus displacing Gikuyu history from a cyclical repetition into a linear progression. Sicherman notes:

Dedan Kimathi...is "of Iregi generation" (*Trial* 36, 49); this is not to be taken as a literal reference to his age-set but to Kimathi's role as "revolter" - the actual meaning of the word. (1990: 238)

Karega's name derives from the verb *rega* (Sicherman glosses 'Karega' as 'rebel'; 1990: 207), and encodes the *iregi* age-set. Nyakinyua's husband is of the *ndemi* age-set. The 'reality' named in Kimathi, Ndemi and Karega, is thus the revolutionary/innovative institution of a 'democratic' form of Gikuyu traditional government. The materiality which is Named, and propered, in this reality is 'woman': the clitoridectomized 'woman' who is physiologically dis-membered in order that the Name of the Father may remain identical with it-Self; the Selfsame.

In his perceptive article on Petals of Blood, Rustum Kozain notes:

Florence Stratton does not see the cyclical pattern [of Ngugi's narrative] in conflict with the express vision of the novel. To her the cyclical pattern is in consonance with, or as she ascribes it to, Ngugi's vision of history and the "basic theme of the novel". This despite the fact that a cyclical view of history, with its concomitant sense of futility, would sit uncomfortably, I suspect, with the dialectical conception of history one would expect Ngugi to have. (1990: 88n, Stratton article cited in bibliography (1988))

Lisa Curtis follows a similar argument:

These, then, are the problems arising from the historical perspective of Petals of Blood. The relentless cycles of time assert themselves at all levels of plot and narrative, undermining the revolutionary theme which finds expression in images

of rebirth. (1984: 204)

I would argue that Ngugi is attempting, unsuccessfully, to naturalize a traditional/mythical narrative of innovation/revolution, which is already gender-ideologically overdetermined, into a dialectic which is not Marxist but familial, and whose sublimated socio-legal production is the 'generation' of children - the 'new' social order. History in Petals of Blood is ostensibly both cyclical (in which 'woman' repeatedly produces (male) children) and linear (in which men become heroes of historical struggle). Nyakinyua refers to the M.P. for Ilmorog as 'this Ndamathia which only takes but never gives back' (116) and this refers to the banishing of a river-monster (Ndamathia) by the Ndemi generation after the *itwika* (see Kenyatta, 1968: 187-197) - the narrative's blueprint for the revolutionary overthrow of KANU. When one considers that Kimathi was a teacher who became a revolutionary (Sicherman, 1990: 133), or that Munira's name denotes the 'stump' (Meyer, 1991: 33) missing from Abdulla, the Mau Mau insurgent's, body, or that Joseph (the exemplary revolutionary student) and Old Mariamu ('a Swahili translation of Mary'; Meyer; 1990: 35) the peasant woman encode the christological messianic narrative, one is not far from locating Ngugi's self-interested representation of the intellectual élite which grafts itself onto the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army and re-members Mau Mau - or infuses the peasantry with the Word they lack - and one is close to detecting in Petals of Blood the collapsing of class distinctions which should be so central to Ngugi's Marxist thesis, despite Karega's concluding polemic about the impending revolution of workers and peasants (344-345).

Returning to Wanjia, it becomes necessary to ask what is 'reproduced' in her drawing of Kimathi/Abdulla/Karega? In other words, what is the drawing's gender-ideological import? Elsewhere, Ngugi himself writes:

The spirit of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) and its leader Dedan Kimathi is being reborn today.

(1993: 100)

The peculiar feature of this 'rebirth' is that it should be subsumed under a patronymic, and that this patronymic should include the fantasized possibility of Gikuyu males possessing female reproductive propensities, as if to efface entirely the sign 'woman', as mothering-function, from the historiographic narrative the mother predicates. Wanja's name, given to her by her playmates at school and by the Ilmorog townsfolk (25, 264), is Wanja Kahii ('kahii' denotes an uncircumcized boy), because she was considered a tomboy in her youth. Nding'uri, whose name denotes 'courage', also denotes a 'man left uncircumcized' (Meyer, 1991: 120). His brother, Karega, might easily, through a strategic orthographical slippage, be read as 'Karego' ('small girl'; Presley, 1992: 185). Prior to Wanja and Karega's sexual congress, while the village delegation is on its journey, they meet by chance:

'Let us sit down,' he suggested, suddenly feeling weary. 'Isn't it strange that that hill should have stood when all else collapsed?'

'That! It is the hill of the uncircumcised boys. It is said that if a boy runs right round it, he will turn into a girl and a girl will turn into a boy. Do you believe that too?'

'No, I don't. We should have heard of cases of some who had tried and were turned into their opposites.'

'I wish it were true!' she said rather fiercely, almost bitterly. (126)

At the lawyer's house, the villagers discuss the sculpture of a freedom fighter:

Abdulla stood a few seconds in front of Kimathi's picture and then he abruptly hobbled across the room and out into the garden. The others surrounded the sculpture and commented on the fighter's hair, the heavy lips and tongue in open laughter, and the sword around the waist. But why did he possess breasts, somebody asked: it was as if it was a man and a woman in one: how could that be?

They started arguing about it until Nyakinyua almost silenced them with her simple logic.

'A man cannot have a child without a woman. A woman

cannot have a child without a man. And was it not a man and a woman who fought to redeem this country?'
(161)

A few observations are pertinent here. Firstly, the sculpture (with its laughter) and the picture of Kimathi are both encoded in Wanja's gesture towards the father of her child. Secondly, Nyakinyua's inference is consistent with all of Ngugi's texts, in which the child is associated with the product of resistance: the utopia. Finally, I read into the fantasies of trans-sexuality a recuperative metaphor, in which the displaced womb-envy of the Gikuyu patriarchy (which I shall discuss in the following chapter) is iterated in the operation of the patronymic: the child, produced in the womb, and the mother as producer of the child are propered by the Father's name, appropriated. Woman's productive excess is appropriated in order to stage a male-sexed historiographic narrative.

Who then is the father of Wanja's child? Abdulla is implied and Kimathi is represented. Rather than opting for Ngugi's paternal fiction - which disintegrates even as it forms - I suggest that any patronymic which names the child must necessarily be a paternal fiction, given that Wanja's profession as a sex-worker asserts the very impossibility of deducing a patrilineage; an impossible deduction which is in turn, recuperated as the fantasized extreme of Ngugi's narrative. The father might be Kimeria, Chui, Mzigo, one of the townsmen or workers, or Abdulla. Let us, 'for interest's sake', read against the grain (the phallogentric History) of Petals of Blood, in-formed by the very possibility of hybridity suggested by an intertextual 'Petals of Blood', and posit 'Chui' (the leopard) as one possible biological father of the child. Both Wanja, the prostitute, and Chui, the footballer, 'play the field' at certain narrative junctures. Since any attempt to deduce paternity must be fictional, my reading is not interested in recuperating a paternal fiction. Rather, it investigates the gender-political implications of mooting a (possible) theoretical fiction. This reading might strategically subvert the masculist historiographic narrative

which 'redeems' Wanja from the position of 'fallen woman' into the effaced subject-position of 'mother'. Equally, Wanja's class-transgressive potential as a prostitute (even if it endures for 'minutes of glory')³ might subvert Ngugi's narrative of history by producing her in the active subject-position of sex-worker. In this reading, does Wanja speak under the sign of impropriety - that is, does she remain irreducible to the patronymic as Law?

Muga Gicaru relates the gender-political significance of the leopard in the Gikuyu community:

We have many names for leopards, some owing their origin to superstition and others to the leopard's way of behaviour which has earned him respect as well as hatred and notoriety. Among our people it is considered bad manners to look a mother-in-law straight in the eye, especially in the case of newly married or engaged couples. From this relationship the leopard got the title of "mother-in-law", because of the way he looks at you...In this very old shanty, sung by the girls when they are in love or as an excuse for not saying 'yes' to a proposal, you will note that they make the leopard their hero.

*I waigoko, I waigoko;
Maitu araraga akinuma,
Akinuma, akinuma
Akiningiriria wainoga.
I wainoga, I wainoga
Mundu uri nderu githuri,
I githuri, I githuri,
Na ndangireka ndayethere
Ndiyethere, ndiyethere,
Kimongonye kia mwanake,
Kia mwanake, kia mwanake,
Kirindoraga, ngainama,
I ngainama, I ngainama
Ngainamia maitho ta ngari
I tangari, I tangari kana ngodu
I kiria nyeki...waigoko.*

Oh, Oh, old man
Mum nags me the whole night
Persuading me to accept a lover.

A tired old wart with grey hair on his chest.
Old tired wart, old tired wart.
She does not think I am able to find
A young and healthy man

Young healthy man, young healthy man
 Who will make me turn my eyes down
 Turn my eyes down, turn my eyes down
 Like a leopard
 Like a leopard, like a leopard
 Or sheep grazing in the field.
 Old chum.... (1958: 27-28)

This song⁴, performed by the Gikuyu subaltern (as sexed subject) in order to register dissent against a marriage proposal, is, in my reading, one available means by which she refuses to be propered as the appropriate(d) property of the Gikuyu Selfsame, which assigns propriety to the subaltern woman who occupies the subject-position 'wife' or 'mother'. Equally her choice of the leopard (*ngari* (or *ngare*; Njoroge, 1993: 50)) as hero, which is also the choice of the mother-in-law (*maitho ta ngari*, mother like a leopard; not translated by Gicaru), does not denote submission or servility (implied by '...who will make me turn my eyes down...like a leopard'), since the song subverts the socio-sexual exchange, instituted by marriage, which would produce the very subject-position of 'mother-in-law'. I am also aware that the signifier *ngari* (the leopard) is not reducible to the patronymic of *Chui* (the leopard) whom I have proposed as the fictional father of Wanja's child. My reading does not recuperate a patriarchal authority here, since my premises are necessarily fictional. The semiotic differential between *chui* and *ngari* operates as a destabilizing or disruptive force within my own reading. My anti-colonial feminist positionality does not, therefore, derive its authority by producing the Gikuyu subaltern woman as its self-consolidating other. Rather, my positionality is dispersed by the slippages in discourse which the voices of reticent subaltern brides-to-be bring to bear on (my analysis of) Ngugi's novel. My interest in producing this reading is to address Wanja's desire as a gendered subject, her class-transgressive activities as a sex-worker, and her historical agency as an insurgent subject.

What are the implications of this reading against-the-grain, or strategic misreading⁵, of Petals of Blood for criticism of the

novel? Firstly, Wanja would begin to productively exceed Fikeni Senkoro's patronising reference to:

...our knowledge of the prostitute's humiliation in the modern city as Wanja gives an account of her filthy and dehumanising experience as a barmaid and prostitute. (1982)

Equally, the anti-colonial feminist critic might begin to interrogate the masculist interest at work in Senkoro's misreading of the 'final act of the killings of the local directors by Wanja' (1982: 68), or to speculate as to the masculist investment in Grant Kamenju's assertion that Petals of Blood is 'a demonstration of the truth and validity of Lenin's penetrating analysis as applied to the post-independence state' (1985: 130). This critic might productively disaffirm Aborisade's view of Petals of Blood as the 'true novel of the proletariat', given that the proletariat in that novel is differentiated by socio-historical constructions of gender:

Part four [of the novel] demonstrates the logical denouement: preparation for an inevitable struggle that would free the people through an overthrow of the system. The elements are already present in the formation of the workers' party, the increasing awareness of Joseph, Abdulla's "brother" and the embryonic Abdulla in Wanja's pregnancy. (Aborisade, 1989: 69)

Aborisade's comment on the final section of the novel does not distance itself from Ngugi's phallogical production of 'woman' as a 'mother of men', and it implies that female resistance consists in reproduction (in which the product is always re-appropriated by the Gikuyu Selfsame).

Sharma's criticism of Ngugi's analysis of the comprador élite as analogous to 'a pimp who would proudly hold down his mother to be brutally raped by foreigners' obtains in Sharma's Marxist assertion that Ngugi 'refuses to concede that any [revolutionary] role is to be played by the bourgeoisie' (1988: 25-26). The anti-colonial feminist might add that Sharma's criticism omits the

rather obvious gender-differential which operates in Ngugi's construction of the comprador élite. Further, Ngugi's 'revolutionary traditionalism' locates the Gikuyu subaltern woman in traditional subject positions - which are overdetermined by Gikuyu patriarchal discourse - in order to found a linear phallogocratic revolutionary narrative. Thomas H. Jackson claims that Petals of Blood and A Grain of Wheat:

...present themselves as articulations of lore, liberating acts of speech in themselves that try to present a true *logos* to guide communal, in fact national, *ergon*. Both novels are statements of the Word that liberates into a fruitful future by weaving words into a just articulation of past and present. (1991: 15)

To these assertions our critic might add that in Ngugi's texts the categories of the communal and national are gendered female in order to embody the semes of a phallogocentric historiography. In this historiography, fruitful women ('mothers of men') are relegated to an idyllic past and a utopian future in order to institute masculine cultural prerogatives. The gender-framing of Ngugi's narrative constitutes the *parergonal logic*⁶ of the Gikuyu patriarchal Law, and it 'frames' Wanja the madam (in the sense of whore rather than mistress of a domicile) as outLaw.

Equally, this critic might contribute the disruptive category of gender-analysis to Edna Aizenberg's otherwise astute assertion that, in Petals of Blood:

...there is a superposition of temporalities; utopian linearity and traditional cyclicity - the rhythms of Ilmorog's life and world view - are mediated by the Yeatsian gyres of the novel's marcotemporal [*sic*] organization. "Walking", "Toward Bethlehem", "To Be Born" are the names of the first three parts of the book with the fourth called, "Again...La Luta Continua." (1990: 93)

In the ellipsis of the final heading, the critic might discover the Name of a silent Father, who perennially appropriates woman's produce by inserting it into the category of the Selfsame via the

act of naming/propering, in order to found a linear History of male struggle. (S)he would begin by reading the socio-historical differential which operates in the production of gendered subjects.

In terms of this reading, Wanja would speak under the sign of 'mother of men' in a manner which is neither self-identical with the mothering-function (which is effaced even as it produces male historical subjects), nor with the subject-position reconstructed by Gikuyu patriarchal myth in order to found male politico-cultural and historical prerogatives - the mother-impregnated-by-men. Rather, the 'mother of men' would be read as an instance of catachresis⁷: the 'mother-in-law' (mother like a leopard), who is disconstituted as Law in the act of enunciation. Equally, Wanja the sex-worker would speak under the sign of virginity without becoming the vehicle (or 'folkwagon') which reproduces an androcentric people's history.

Karega's concluding thoughts are represented in these terms:

Tomorrow it would be the workers and the peasants leading the struggle and seizing power to overturn the system of all its preying bloodthirsty gods and gnomish angels, bringing to an end the reign of a few and the era of drinking blood and feasting on human flesh. Then, only then, would the kingdom of man and woman really begin, they joying and loving in creative labour...For a minute he was so carried on the waves of this vision and of the possibilities it opened up for all the Kenyan working and peasant masses that he forgot the woman beside him. (344).

Wanja might interdict Karega's conclusions by affirming her 'sex' as the site of production which exceeds the narrative's patriarchal frame. As mistress/madam, Wanja's prostitution might open up very different possibilities for Ngugi's narrative. Most importantly, she would claim historical agency as a sex-worker (and a lineage from the Mau Mau prostitutes who procured ammunition for the insurgents in the interstices of colonial and traditional/nationalist productions of Mau Mau). Secondly, she would work in desire rather than labouring in matrimony. Finally, she would militate for a very different kingdom than that of the perennial reproductive coupling ordered by Gikuyu patriarchal

discourses in which the subaltern woman as historical subject is conveniently forgotten for a 'minute of glory' in order to sustain a male historical presence.

Chapter 7

The Neocolony as Prostituted Economy: corpulent capital and tropes of 'the fallen woman' in *Devil on the Cross* and *Matigari*

In The Pleasure of the Text, Roland Barthes states that 'the writer is one who plays with the body of his mother' (1975: 37). Barthes is adopting a psychoanalytic, and specifically, a Lacanian, view of language and narration. In terms of psychoanalytic theory, the production of significance (whether by 'author' or 'reader') is a production according to the subject's desire. In an Oedipalized subject, this desire addresses (through the vicarious medium of the signifier) the original lost object - the mother. I find this observation by Barthes particularly enabling for my analysis of Devil on the Cross. The impulse to narrate in this novel is provided by Wariinga's mother:

And then Wariinga's mother came to me when dawn was breaking, and in tears she beseeched me: Gicaandi player, tell the story of the child I loved so dearly. Cast light upon all that happened, so that each may pass judgement only when he knows the whole truth. Gicaandi player, reveal all that is hidden. (7)

What interests me in this passage is that it should be necessary for Wariinga's mother to make such a request in the first place. Why should she not narrate Wariinga's story? The answer lies, I think, in Ngugi's ideological investment in the narrative. The Gicaandi player represents the story-teller in traditional Gikuyu culture, with important gender-political implications regarding Ngugi's affiliation with the Gikuyu patriarchy. On an extra-narratorial level, the novel is written in Gikuyu, Ngugi's mother-tongue. In the passage I have quoted above, I find an allegory of the formation of a feminine subjectivity under patriarchy. The Gicaandi player, the 'prophet of justice', has access to the Symbolic order and is representative of the Law. Narration (the production of significance) and desire are solely his prerogatives. Wariinga's mother, who beseeches him (rather

than telling him, commanding to him, relating to him) is construed according to a lack of desire. In this passage, there is a differentiation between active/dominant and passive/receptive modes of desire. Wariinga's mother is constructed so as to respond only in the latter mode.

In Devil on the Cross, Ngugi is revisiting Gikuyu tradition, but he is not re-envisioning the Gikuyu patriarchy's production of 'woman'. One of the myths which informs the novel in a 'seminal' way is that of the *marimu* (pl. *irimu*), or ogre. This is consistent with Ngugi's attempt to reflect the contemporary problematic of the neocolonial in recognizable traditional form (see Sicherman, 1990: 213). In *The Language of African Fiction*, collected in Decolonizing the Mind, Ngugi writes of this attempt:

Marimu were supposed to possess two mouths, one in front and the other at the back. The one at the back was covered with long hair. They were cruel, very greedy, and they lived on the labour of humans. What about the latter day Marimus? Would the Marimu characters provide me with the image I sought? (1989: 81)

The three stories which the old man from Bahati relates to Gatuira (62-66) contribute to the construction of the neocolonists as ogres: the first is of a peasant who carries an ogre on his back, works for the ogre (gathering food, water and firewood, and cooking) and wastes away as the ogre prospers.

'The second story was about a girl, an ebony beauty with an appealing gap between her teeth. She was named Nyanjiru Kanyarari for three reasons: she was black; she was truly beautiful; and she had rejected the hand of all the young men in her country. But when Nyanjiru saw a young man from a foreign country one day, she immediately claimed that he was the one for whom she had been waiting. She followed him. And do you know what? The young foreigner was a man-eating ogre. He tore off Nyanjiru's limbs one by one and ate them. (62)

In the third story, a poor man, Nding'uri:

...went to a certain cave where the evil spirits dwelt. At the entrance to the cave he was met by a spirit in the shape of an ogre. He had long hair, the colour of mole skin, and the hair fell about his shoulders like a girl's. He had two mouths, one on his forehead and the other at the back of his head. (63-64)

Like the ogres of myth, the neocolonial acolytes 'feed' on the labour of workers in the name of foreign economic interests, defile the purity of Kenyan women and meet in a cave. In Matigari too, the 'ogres currently running the country' (56) translates the defilement of Kenyan women: at a prayer meeting the police attack university students and a woman who is 'eight months pregnant...[has] a miscarriage there and then' (90). However, the 'ogre' myth in Gikuyu culture also privileges the Gikuyu male subject as the custodian of Gikuyu women. For example, in Matigari, Matigari's decision to resume the armed struggle is informed by gender-ideological determinants:

When the worker in metals returned...home, and found an ogre starving his expectant wife, did he send the ogre peace greetings? Did he not first sharpen his spear? (131)

Further, the worker imprisoned with Matigari claims: 'Every worker knows that Robert Williams and John Boy are like twins born out of the womb of the same ogre' (65). Given that human motherhood is granted a privileged place in all of Ngugi's fiction, it is unthinkable that the neocolonial representatives could be born of a human female. Production in a human womb is, as we shall see, reserved for those who bear the heroes of Kenyan resistance.

In Devil on the Cross, Ngugi is using myths of the ogre in order to naturalize a certain model of consumption, although the consumption in that novel is predicated, quite crucially, on constructions of the visceral, rather than on constructions of the pecuniary or fiscal¹. I find the metaphor of visceral greed (including genital and alimentary lusts), which constructs the

African representatives of global-industrial 'corporate' capital, a useful point of critical departure from which to interrogate Ngugi's representation of the Kenyan neocolony as a prostituted economy. Most of the thieves are depicted as corpulent and greedy and all of the thieves have mistresses. These women are either paid-up lovers placated by the material consolations which accompany their status as fallen women, or prostitutes. Gitutu wa Gataanguru's claim that 'modern love is inconsistent with a tight fist' (100) collapses the distinction between his mistresses and the figure of the prostitute.

Of course, the characters who are imbued with the monstrous aspect of the ogre are not privileged (although their hideousness implies an investment of significance which is the converse of that which is invested in 'the beautiful'). Nevertheless, these characters' representations of their wives and mistresses are produced on the same patriarchal constructions as those which inform the representation of the heroine, Wariinga, who is transferred by her Uncle to the Rich Old Man in order to consolidate a business deal. Like the sugar-girls who are 'devoured' by their 'ogre' lovers, she is 'soft food for a toothless old man' (142).

It is not surprising then that Wariinga associates her own reproductive history with the speeches of the thieves:

The speeches, the thieves' attire, their hymns of self-praise, all these things reminded her of the problems she had faced since she became pregnant by the Rich Old Man from Ngorika and gave birth to a baby girl. (182)

Further, Wariinga imbricates the gendered physiology which produces the Gikuyu woman's subjectivity as a mothering function in the fiscal forces of neocolonial Kenya:

Wariinga spoke to herself out loud: 'Local and International thieves gathered in the same lair, debating ways and means of depriving the whole nation of its rights...That's like a child planning to rob

its mother and inviting others to join in the crime!....' (184)

The consubstantiality of 'Kenya' and 'mother' is produced by all of the voices in Ngugi's narrative, whether or not those voices are privileged.

The metaphor of fruit informs the text's construction of the History of the exploitation of labour in Kenya. As far as the peasant/worker is concerned, it 'embodies' his material lacks, needs, and demands - Muturi and Wangari's exchange makes this figuration clear:

'...The children of us workers are fated to stay out in the sun, thirsty, hungry, naked, gazing at fruit ripening on trees which they can't pick even to quieten a demanding belly! Fated to see food steaming in the pantry, but unable to dip a calabash into the pot to scoop out even a tiny portion! Fated to lie awake all night telling each another [sic] stories about tears and sorrow, asking one another to guess the same riddle day after day: "Oh for a piece of one of those!"'

'Ripe bananas!' Wangari replied, as if Muturi had asked her a real riddle. (46)

This passage occurs amid Muturi's associations between Kenya and the figure of the mother. In my chapter on A Grain of Wheat, I detailed some provisional significances of the banana plant and its fruit in the traditional Gikuyu cultural code. I am unsure if Wangari's answer to the riddle evokes female circumcision and its attendant inscriptions of the female body's reproductive functions, but if it does, then Wangari's allusion to female circumcision is appropriate in the context of a phallogentric discourse - the fetishized female figure is, as I shall argue presently, merely a Symbolic variant of the cultural interpellations which circumscribe her dis-membered physiological counterpart. Equally, the fruit (or bananas) conjoins the signs of the children of the workers (whose production is the result of labour) and 'women' (whose 'labour' is the 'fruit' of reproduction).

As regards the Kenyan neocolonial comprador class, the fruit is the sign of power, privilege and prerogatives. Gitutu wa Gataanguru relates how he acquired the money to buy the land which founds his fortune:

'I left [Gateru, the white seller's] house, and went to see a friend, a young man who used to work in a bank. I told him that I needed a loan of 10,000 shillings. He laughed when he saw my face, lined with worry. Only 10,000? I said, "Yes." Again he laughed. He told me not to worry. He had just been given an Uhuru fruit. (104)

The Uhuru fruit, monetary in form, is rendered by metaphor as a commodity for alimentary consumption. It attests to the greed of the comprador class, which devours all of the commodities and luxuries in Kenya: land, surplus value, food and women. Kihaahu wa Gatheeca reiterates the object-status of women in Ngugi's text:

With my own eyes, I've seen someone sell his farm and auction his very beautiful wife in order to meet his election expenses. I paused to think: What's in this business, which has become the object of so much infighting, to the extent that people are prepared to scatter millions of bank-notes about and sell their wives and daughters and farms? Could it be that this tree yields more fruit than all other trees? (114)

The object-status of 'woman' in Devil on the Cross is, I would argue, a phallogocentric construct which imbricates the exchange of the sign 'woman' in the exchange of money and property in Ngugi's representation of neocolonial Kenya. The wives and daughters of which Kihaahu wa Gatheeca speaks are prostituted - in the broader sense of the word - by the extensive influence of foreign capital.

Where the Gikuyu 'woman' aspires to foreign standards of beauty (in which she masks herself in whiteface) she begins to assume the aspect of the ogre. Wariinga, for instance, has hair 'the colour of moleskin' (11) due to hair-straightening procedures. Over against this simulated beauty, Ngugi posits an originary,

'natural' beauty:

Often, when she walked along the road without self-consciousness, her breasts swaying jauntily like two ripe fruits in a breeze, Wariinga stopped men in their tracks. (11)

I find the images associated with Wariinga's body and breasts (the sign of woman's nurturing capacity) interesting, because they suggest the ingestion of the female body by the male gaze - a look which orders its object according to the bearer's desire. Here, there seems to be little which distinguishes a scopophilic narrative from the gluttony of the ogre who devours the beautiful, black, unattainable Nyanjiru Kanyarari (62). The myth(s) of the ogre naturalize the ideological subjection of the Gikuyu woman in and by the colonial and the indigenous patriarchies. In *Subaltern Studies: deconstructing historiography*, Spivak writes:

The first lesson of ideology is that a "popular prejudice" mistakes itself for "human nature," the original mother-tongue of history. (1986: 211)

If Ngugi's effort to render neocolonialism through the medium of Gikuyu language and myth 'naturally' in-corporates the signifier 'woman' for its metaphor, then his novel arguably constitutes a populism that misconstrues 'national liberation' as equivalent to the usurpation of the colonial Symbolic by the Gikuyu patriarchy. What is at issue in Ngugi's narrative is not the production of the (gendered) other by a colonial or an indigenous Selfsame, but the substitution of one phallocracy for another².

However, even this substitution is incomplete. At the Devil's Feast, the barmaid's attire is 'revealing':

Barmaids moved from table to table, taking orders for drinks. They were all dressed in catsuits of black wool. The suits were form-fitting: they clung to the contours of the girls' bodies so closely that a distant onlooker might have thought that the girls were naked. On the girls' bottoms were fixed small

white patches shaped like rabbit's tails. On their breasts were pinned two plastic fruits. Each girl also wore a band around her head on which was written in English: *I love you*. The girls looked like apparitions from another world. (92)

Significantly, the barmaids' breasts are covered by fruit, much as Wariinga's breasts are inscribed by the image of fruit. The desire which orders the representation of the debased femininity of the barmaids is, I would argue, almost indistinguishable from the desire which informs the description of Wariinga's body. In the field of representation, there is very little difference between metaphor (or, more generally, imagery) and simulation. The fruit is, in my reading, a substitute for woman's *produce* or *production*; the child which exceeds the closed circle of reproduction and which must be named in order to reiterate the paternal fiction and re-appropriate female production into the hierarchy of the Selfsame. The gradation which does exist is that the barmaids' 'fruits' are not 'real' (they are glamorous), whereas Wariinga's 'fruits' are 'real' (and therefore beautiful). The barmaids are constructed according to a model of lack. Wariinga is constructed as the bearer of 'truth', beauty or meaning. Wariinga corresponds with the opposite pole of femininity produced by the Gikuyu patriarchy; she is 'woman' invested with the phallus, the fetishized woman³.

Devil on the Cross might, then, be read as symptomatic of a displacement of the womb envy which informs the Gikuyu patriarchy's mythical reconstruction of pre-history. According to Gikuyu myth, harsh matriarchal rulers were overthrown when men decided to inseminate them, and promptly proceeded to do so. Subsequently, women became 'mothers of men'. Wariinga's 'breasts like two ripe fruits in a breeze' (11) imply a displaced womb, resituated at the site of the (male) infant's nexus with the body of the mother. The waitresses at the feast (with two plastic fruits pinned on their breasts and bands around their heads inscribed with English text (and Imperialist subtext)): '*I love you*' (92)) are, in this reading, barren. This barrenness inscribes an origin which has previously been posited by

discourses which produced *Mau Mau*, and specifically Kimathi's, representations of the Kenyan homeguards as '*thata cia bururi*' ('barren ones of the country'; see my fourth chapter). Ngugi's construction of the homeguards is redolent of these representations:

When the British terrorists, together with the homeguards, their faithful Kenyan watchdogs - you sterile bastards: you sold our country for the sake of your bellies - saw that they were about to be defeated by the *Mau Mau* guerilla forces, they increased their indiscriminate torture and oppression of the peasants and workers of the whole country. (138)

Wariinga posits the defilement of Kenyan women as obtaining in the frustration of an originary ambition:

'Let me tell you. When a woman is in her youth, she has beautiful dreams about a future in which she and her husband and her children will dwell forever in domestic peace in a house of their own. There are some who dream of the educational heights they will scale, of the demanding jobs they will take on, of the heroic deeds they will do on behalf of their country, deeds that will inspire later generations to sing their praises thus: "Oh, our mother, a self-made national hero!" (136)⁴

These assertions elide any notions of 'woman' as a cultural agency which may exist without bearing the inscription of the terms 'man' or 'husband'. Ngugi is not only sentimental, but also patently sexist, to assume that Kenyan women's ambitions should, or even can, lie solely in obtaining a husband, bearing children and residing in domestic bliss thereafter. Further, those women who pursue education, employment or heroic deeds are subsumed under the sign 'our mother'. Of course, the mother is never a 'self-made' subjectivity; it always includes the introjected term of the biological father. In addition, the mothering-function in Ngugi's texts consists in re-producing male heroes. This is suggested in *Matigari*, by the women 'singing that they will give birth to more *Matigari* ma *Njiruungi*' (119), and in *Devil on the Cross*, by Wariinga's(?) rhetorical question(!): 'Wasn't *Kimaathi*

born of a Kenyan woman?'. The question engenders its own answer.

Gatuirira reports Wangari's confrontation with the thieves, prior to her arrest:

"...These are the imperialist watchdogs...throw them into the Eternal Jail...For that's the fate of all those who sell foreigners the heritage of our founding patriarchs and patriots!" (196-197, emphasis added)

I view this textual moment as one of slippage, in which Ngugi's affiliation with the Gikuyu patriarchy is demystified, somewhat ironically, by Wangari's uncritical support of the patriarchal legacy of Gikuyu resistance, and the superscription of male prerogatives (tantamount to History itself) which efface her own sex as an agency in insurgency. Wangari is instrumentalized so as to elide the crucial rôles played by the Gikuyu subaltern in supporting and maintaining *Mau Mau*: one of these rôles was enacted by Nairobi prostitutes who obtained bullets (or often, a single bullet) from their homeguard clientele. There, the economy of insurgency, predicated on production by the female 'sex', was not alimentary or visceral, although I do not, in principle, preclude the possibility that the job at hand or the necessity of concealing the clandestine produce may have required the prostitutes to bite the bullet on occasion. This reading of insurgency is, nonetheless, foreclosed by Ngugi's narrative. In *Matigari* too, Guthera does not prostitute herself to rescue her father from execution - he has acted as a *Mau Mau* courier, carrying bullets in his Bible - but she does prostitute herself in order to support her siblings after he is executed (33-37). In *Matigari* and in *Devil on the Cross*, the patriots of the *Mau Mau* insurgency are patriarchs. In other words, the Gikuyu 'woman' of Ngugi's later fiction becomes an empty vassal, without subjective agency, which exhibits a male-sexed historiographic narrative, much as Wariinga's mother's story is 'voiced-over' by the Gicaandi player.

Gatuirira continues to tell Wariinga about Wangari's

confrontation with the thieves:

'Wariinga, how can I describe the scene adequately? It looked as if everyone in the cave had been transfixed by the electric power of Wangari's words. Oh, Wangari was beautiful, I can tell you. Oh, yes, Wangari's face shone as she stood before us all, and it looked as if her courage had stripped years from her body and given her new life. It was as if the light in her face were illuminating the hearts of all those present, and her voice carried the power and the authority of a people's judge. (197)

The value that accrues to Wangari, once she has assumed her patriarchal alias, is youth and beauty (in her younger days, during her resistance activities, she missed the chance to beautify herself in accordance with Gikuyu custom). Wangari's beauty is not 'natural'. Rather, it naturalizes the ideology of male privilege. Gatuira's (gendered) focalization reveals this in a moment of transgression: 'Oh, Wangari was beautiful, I can tell you.' (my emphasis). Wangari's beauty, in order for that value to accrue to her, must be evaluated by a male gaze which dis-covers itself there. In other words, Wangari's beauty bears the mark of male authority and legitimation. Once a courier for Mau Mau, she now carries 'the power and authority of a people's judge'.

Ngugi's logocentrism is centred on a nebulously-defined people's justice as due process and the law. In Devil on the Cross, the narrative's phallogocentrism is centred on two determinant moments - the student leader giving Wariinga the invitation to the Devil's feast (in order that she may 'know' the causes of her subjection) and Muturi giving Wariinga the pistol (in order that she may effect her liberation). Here, we are not far from locating Ngugi's self-interested representation of the 'transparent' position of the educated subject who reveals to the masses the causes of their oppression, in order that they may liberate themselves, or from the masculist investment which produces 'woman' as fetish (bearer of the phallus). Further, the novel's phallogocentrism is centred on the binary logic of two

hierarchized binate couples: the privileged gender binary is 'legitimate male worker-peasant-student//woman as mother as Kenya' and the subordinated gender binary is 'illegitimate male ogre-thief-boss-lover-seducer//Kenya as rapable-prostituted-mistress (who is either barren or an irresponsible mother)'⁵.

An obvious point, but one worth making, is that these binaries are by no means self-evident or 'true'. They only become meaningful because Devil on the Cross narrativizes History into an ideologically-constructed logic of binarism, and because 'woman' or 'mother' or 'Wariinga' is the bearer of History's significance. It seems to me that it is precisely because Ngugi's interest lies in a self-engendering masculist historical narrative (in which 'woman' or 'mother' is subsumed under the sign 'Kenya') that he overlooks the pervasive silencing of Kenyan women's voices in narratives of Kenyan history, as well as the possibility that Kenyan women's subjection consists as much in the institution of marriage as it does in their restricted access to the job market.

Wariinga's transformation into the 'new' Kenyan woman is, in my reading, something of an anomaly, given that the 'new' Kenyan woman is construed according to the vestiges of (very old) Gikuyu patriarchal structures of dominance. On the one hand, Jacinta Wariinga ('the flower...decorated with wire ornaments'; Meyer, 1991: 104) refuses to be 'a mere flower...to decorate the doors and windows and tables of other people's lives' (216) and on the other, '[her hair] is long and black and soft...Her clothes fit her so perfectly, it's as if she was created in them' (217). This inconsistency in the representation of Wariinga is implicit in Ngugi's attempt to confront Gikuyu women's oppression without confronting the Gikuyu and colonial patriarchies. With Muturi's pistol on her person, Wariinga - biologically-coded as female - is narratively and historiographically coded as male. Significantly, the pronoun used to denote an abstract or non-specific worker is masculine (222)⁶.

In a peculiar moment of slippage, the novel's patriarchal master-discourse is demystified when Wariinga confronts the Rich Old Man:

'You want the love between me and Gatuira to end, don't you?'

'Yes, I do.'

'All right. Do you want to marry me? That is, do you want to go through a wedding ceremony so that I can become your second wife?' (253)

The implication here is that the Rich Old Man's seduction of the younger Wariinga would be ameliorated if he were to marry the older Wariinga in order to restore her former honour. It is also remarkable that, in a 'moment of truth', immediately prior to his death, the Rich Old Man falls to his knees when he recognizes Wariinga's beauty (253). Of course, Wariinga's beauty is not ever 'hers'. In a phallogentric narrative, 'feminine' attractiveness is always organized by a male gaze: beauty is in the look of the beholder. In Devil on the Cross, beauty is the cultural value that accrues to Wariinga as biological female, and this value circulates in an economy of narrative significance which is exclusively constituted by a masculinist investment.

In a certain sense then, Wariinga is a prostitute in the novel's economy of signs. What Ngugi is ideologically unable to accept is that 'beauty' and the female mothering-function (the propensity for reproduction of man-power), which are privileged characteristics in his field of the 'feminine', are also modes of subjection by which Gikuyu patriarchal discourses interpellate their objects. Equally, Ngugi's subordination of the prostitute/fallen woman implies that she is a palpable entity within culture (she is 'Ready-to-Yield'). In Matigari, Guthera is redeemable for the narrative because she withholds her services from the untouchables of the Kenyan police force, and because she sleeps with one of these untouchables in order to free Matigari from prison. She thus prostitutes her convictions for a *greater good*. Thereafter, she is reincorporated into the family structure:

'Yes. We are the children of Matigari ma Njiruungi,'
Muruiki said. 'We are the children of the patriots who
survived the war.'

'And their wives as well!' said Guthera, smiling. 'Or
which other wives and children were you looking for?'
(139)

One might displace the subordinate construction of the prostitute in Ngugi's later fiction by arguing that prostitution in Kenya speaks to the propensity of female desire to bargain outside of the dialectic of the Selfsame, and outside of the institution of marriage for that matter. In this argument, prostitution is one means by which Kenyan women exploit their commodification as 'beautiful' and 'desirable' objects. Further, it was precisely the class-transgressive potential of prostitutes which contributed materially to the Mau Mau insurgency. A subversive reading of Ngugi's later fiction might begin to search for agency in the represented Gikuyu subaltern or sub-proletarian woman by prostituting Ngugi's economy of signs. In such a reading, Devil on the Cross or Matigari might begin to speak 'a bit more fruitfully' to Kenyan women who actively inhabit the subject position of 'sex-workers', rather than 'fallen women', 'defiled mothers' or metaphors for a pre-lapsarian past and a post-lapsarian utopia.

Prostituting Translation

There is a potential difficulty in engaging gender-constructions in a text in translation. How, after all, does one ever know whether or not the English translations of Devil on the Cross and Matigari are true to the spirit of the 'original' Gikuyu texts? Further, is it not possible that, even as these texts collapse strategies of inclusion (of Kenyan women into political life) into strategies of recuperation (of Kenyan women into patriarchy), the texts might equally be opening spaces of dissent for Kenyan women; spaces which are lost in translation and in cultural recoding⁷? The critic is caught in a double bind when confronting the text in translation: the critique must

necessarily vacillate between assigning the Kenyan woman as an appropriated (and therefore, self-consolidating) other, and lapsing into the total unrepresentability of an unknowable Other. Either of these two positions would recuperate the proto-Imperialist narratives of an African subject capable of appropriation for the consolidation of the Imperialist Self, or of an inscrutable African subject, lost in the darkneses of an impenetrable outside, and therefore occupying a subhuman object-status. To assume either position would be to place the critic in the position of colonizer.

Following Spivak's reading of deconstruction, I would suggest that the impossibility of criticism posits the very necessity for criticism. It is important to note that english⁸ criticism can never fully have access to the 'original' Gikuyu texts. In other worlds, criticism is never entirely self-present or undifferentiated. However, the Gikuyu 'original' is not an undifferentiated or self-present origin either. In a footnote to her reading of Mahasweta Devi's 'The Breast-Giver', Spivak mentions English as a medium of defilement in that text (1987: 309). The same might be said of the english and Kiswahili passages in Devil on the Cross and Matigari. The ogres (which include the foreign delegates to the Devil's Feast, John Boy junior and Robert Williams junior) defile the Gikuyu language passages in these novels by their 'foreign' mediums of expression. Gikuyu is posited as an originary language which translates the autochthony of the speaking subject. Nevertheless, Ngugi admits in *The Language of African Fiction* that Gikuyu itself includes the trace of a colonial outside:

Rival imperialisms and the colonial practice of divide and rule introduced contradictory representations of the sound systems of the very same language, let alone of similar African languages in the same colonial boundary. For instance, the Gikuyu language had two rival orthographies developed by the protestant and catholic missionaries. Before this was rectified, two Gikuyu speaking children could well have been in the position where they could not read each others [sic] letters or essays. (1989: 66-67)

Ngugi does not state who rectified the contradictions in the two orthographies, but I suspect that it is possible that modern Gikuyu, whether it is spoken by the bourgeoisie or the worker, or indeed the peasant, carries traces of the institutional and epistemological violence of colonialism. If this is the case, then the gikuyu used by Ngugi in Matigari or Devil on the Cross is not an homogenous or undifferentiated 'means of communication and carrier of culture' (*The Language of African Literature*, 1989: 13), or the founding moment of a community of workers and peasants, but a 'prostituted mother-tongue'. Even Kenya, defined geo-graphically by boundaries agreed upon by colonial powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 (see Sicherman, 1990: 45 and Ngugi, 1989: 23) is a 'motherland' prostituted by the circumscription and inscriptions of a colonial presence.

The gikuyu text then, is irreducible to the critic reading in translation (it can not be colonized) and irreducible to the author-effect (it is already colonized). One productive reading then, would be to equate both english and gikuyu texts with the Mau Mau prostitute, who works in the between of colonization and insurgency, and who is propered by neither the male insurgent subject (her investment is outside of the phallogentric narrative of resistance), nor by the colonizing zeal of her clientele (she militates against sexual and racial conquest even as she accedes to it). In this reading, the space of dissent (included in Ngugi's narrative of history as an excluded possibility) belongs solely to the subaltern sexed subject as an agency in insurgency, bringing the positions of author and critic into productive crisis.

Conclusion

The cultural significance of female circumcision dominates Ngugi's narratives of resistance and contributes to his production of the Gikuyu subaltern woman as a mothering-function which embodies both an idyllic past and a utopian future. By producing 'woman' as a 'mother of men', Ngugi re-produces her as the place of castration or lack, and averts the reader's attention from maternity as a form of work and from the Gikuyu subaltern woman as an agency in insurgency. In the figure of the prostitute, I have attempted to locate one representative of a form of the subaltern woman's work, of itinerant Gikuyu female desire and of the gendered insurgent subject. The prostitute subverts Ngugi's masculist narrative of resistance by working outside of the gynaeceum, the House of Mumbi, which, in Gikuyu nationalist representations, is co-extensive with Kenya as gendered locale. Equally, when Gikuyu and English are viewed as *mother-tongues* which are incommensurable with one another, the subaltern prostitute figured as language shuttles between author and critic, subverting the authority of an ethnocentric patriarchal master-narrative and the authority of the anti-colonial feminist critic reading in translation.

In Devil on the Cross, immediately prior to Wariinga's marriage to Gatuira, Wariinga's mother enquires of her daughter:

'...Have you told this young man that you have a daughter old enough to be initiated into womanhood - that is, if girls were still circumcised, as they used to be?' (234)

In Matigari, the chorus, 'If only it were dawn / So that I could share the cold waters with the early bird' (4, 171) is, according to Wangui wa Goro's translator's note:

A reference to *maranja* (Gikuyu): a festival of dance and song performed during circumcision. The description also alludes to the initiation ceremony preceding armed struggle. (4n)

The note condenses one of my central arguments in relation to Ngugi's fiction: that circumcision as rite is crucial to Ngugi's representation of armed struggle as the testing-ground of Gikuyu male potency. The masculist historiography which underlies his later works is predicated on the silencing of the clitoridectomized subaltern; whether this clitoridectomy is physical (as in the traditional production of the female body as sign by the Gikuyu patriarchy) or symbolic (as in the production of 'woman' as 'mother of men'). Where she is a 'mother of men', 'woman's' production in the womb is negated in order to found masculine cultural and historical prerogatives. These two productions of 'woman' as sign are frequently co-extensive in Ngugi's fiction. What I find curious in Wariinga's mother's words is the assertion that the practice of clitoridectomy has lapsed and disappeared from the face of contemporary Kenya. Kouba and Mouasher's research and Tobe Levin's article, which I have quoted in my third chapter, indicate that female circumcision is increasingly prevalent in Kenyan society; with the notable exception that it is now divorced from its traditional context and is performed under the surgical conditions of Kenyan hospitals. There is an interesting contradiction between Ngugi's fictional account of female circumcision and the latest research to emerge on Kenyan gendering mechanisms.

What then are the implications of this contradiction for Ngugi's political project? Either his patriarchal affiliations have produced an interested blindness in relation to the gender subjection of the Gikuyu subaltern, or his position within the Kenyan elite, and perhaps his exile from Kenya, have caused him to misrepresent the very peasant communities which he claims as his constituency. Whichever stance one assumes in relation to Ngugi's fiction, it is clear that Ngugi's use of female circumcision in order to enable a masculist historiography also severely compromises the representativeness of his fiction.

Why then should there be an increase in the prevalence of female circumcision, *albeit* that excision now takes place outside

of traditional cultural inscriptions of the female subject? I believe that one way of explaining this anomaly is by viewing female circumcision as a primarily economic phenomenon. If Ngugi's analysis of neocolonialism is indeed correct, then the peasantry is the sector of Kenyan society hardest hit by the extraction of surplus value across the Kenyan socius. In rural communities, circumcision invests 'woman' (as object of exchange) with value, and the exchange of increasingly younger daughters for the brideprice in cattle must be viewed as part and parcel of the macro-economic forces which are brought to bear on the rural homestead. The anti-colonial feminist critic's work continues to be produced in the face of the double-bind of discontinuous forms of oppression: race, class, gender.

Whether or not prostitution is a viable alternative to traditional forms of income in rural societies is beyond the scope of my research. I do not, in principle, preclude the possibility of the efficacy of prostitution in generating economies which subvert the dialectic of patriarchal desire. For the anti-colonial feminist critic 'reading against the grain' or 'writing in (the) between' of Ngugi's fiction, an uneasy knowledge remains as part of her privilege. By coming to writing (in Cixous' phrase), she takes her pleasure and assumes a position from which she may begin to speak to the Kenyan subaltern woman. But for the subaltern woman the silenced screaming does not abate.

Appendix

The 'Secret Lives' of Mau Mau / the 'Mau Mau' of Secret Lives

In *Secret Lives*, Ngugi embellishes upon his representations of Mau Mau as a radical alterity which will not settle down into the dialectical enclosure of the Selfsame. However, while these representations transgress against colonial framing of the insurgency, they rely upon 'woman' or metaphors of the feminine as referents. The most obvious example is to be found in *Goodbye Africa*, where the shamba 'boy' flouts the authority of the white male protagonist in his social capacities as employer, screening officer, District Officer, and finally, husband. His servant refuses to accept the hand-me-downs which consolidate protagonist's status as the benevolent European settler, whose mission to uplift the moral and material conditions of the African dissimulates his complicity with the expropriation of land and resources from the Kenyan indigene by Imperial capitalism. The protagonist's memories of his former employee are co-extensive with the memories of his wife:

Then one Christmas, the boy suddenly threw back at him the gift of a long coat and ten shillings. The boy had laughed and walked out of his service. For a long time, he could never forget the laughter. This he could have forgiven. But the grief and the misery in his wife's face at the news of the boy's disappearance was something else. (73)

The 'boy's' refusal of servility constitutes a refusal of his positioning as the self-consolidating other of Imperialism, constructed by race and class determinations. This enables the possibility of a return to the colonial Selfsame which is represented by the white male protagonist in the story:

He had forgotten the incident until these, his last months in Africa. Then he had started re-enacting the scene in his dreams, the vision becoming more and more vivid as days and months whistled by. At first the face had only appeared to him by night. His bed held terror for him. Then suddenly, these last few days,

the face started appearing before him in broad daylight. (72)

This passage bears out my assertion that *Mau Mau* as familiar devil is an indeterminate semi-presence on the borders of the settler consciousness and that the familiar devil is the inevitable consequence of the colonizer's entry into a dialogue of misprision. In *Goodbye Africa* this dialogue is rendered in the male protagonist's letter:

Was it wrong for us, with our capital, with our knowledge, with our years of Christian civilization to open and lift a dark country onto the stage of history? I played my part. (75)

The misprision in the letter consists in the male protagonist's belief in the superiority of European culture, knowledge and belief-systems over those of Africa. The possibility that this belief might not be shared by the colonized subject unsettles his own subjectivity in a profound manner. Since the 'other' remains heterogenous to the protagonist's consciousness (his sense of self, his perceived place within the larger narrative of Imperialism), that other is demonized:

Do you remember him? The one who spurned my gift and disappeared, maybe to the forest? He stood in the office with that sneer in his face - like - like the devil. The servile submissive face when he worked for you had gone...I felt a violent rage within such as I had never felt before - I could not bear that grin. I stood and spat into his face. (75)

This passage shares a remarkable affinity with the passage from *Mau Mau* literature which I cited earlier, in which the policeman's subjectivity is unsettled by the 'tall coal-black bastard' that grins at him 'real insolent'. In *Goodbye Africa*, the protagonist orders the execution of the 'shamba boy'. Nonetheless, with the approach of Independence, which manifests as an anomaly given the history of British 'custodianship' of Africa, the young man's face returns to 'haunt' the protagonist, the protagonist is replaced by a black district officer and, most

tellingly, the protagonist discovers that the disappointment which his wife registered when the 'shamba boy' walked out of their employ derived from her emotional and sexual attachment to the young man.

I regard this representation as symptomatic of the crisis of potency which colonization imposes upon the colonized. The transition in attitude which takes place in the female protagonist is revealing of Ngugi's gender-political standpoint and also demonstrates his positioning of female subjectivities as the limit between male antagonists in order to enable a liberatory discourse:

[She] wanted to understand Africa, to touch the centre, and feel a huge continent throb on her fingers...It was during one of her walks that the boy had first made love to her among the banana plantations. Freedom. And afterward their fevered love-making had finally severed her from the world of her husband and other District Officers. (76-77)

The unnamed woman's desire for her former employee (as a subjectivity rather than the embodiment of 'Africa') is never elaborated, and it is clear that Ngugi's representation of her offers the possibility of a sexual realm which is discrete from a realm of politics. Yet, it is precisely the rationale behind her adultery which severs her from the District Officers, and which consequently translates as a socio-sexual defeat for her husband and a political conquest for the young man. Although the female protagonist is by no means part of the subaltern classes, she is produced as a sign which is exchanged in order to validate a liberatory discourse, and her desire is located outside of the historical narrative.

The female protagonist is instrumentalized in her husband's confession, which is an apologia for his Imperialist sympathies. She is the silent addressee of the letter and, when her husband burns his notebook after hearing of her affair, her silence is compounded. The subjectivity which does speak through the flames

is that of the young man. His history (sexual, political and economic) is what un-writes (or subjects to *différance*) the husband's history within Imperialism. The husband locates his relationship with his wife within the broader narrative of Imperialism, as his entry in the notebook indicates:

The white man in Africa must accept a more stringent moral code in the family and in the society at large. For we must set the ideals to which our African subjects must aspire. (79)

The young man's history as the other of Imperialism returns as the unthought outside of the dialectical enclosure, to disrupt the narrative of Imperialism ('The man's ghost would forever pursue him. Africa.' (79)), but this return is posited within the discourse of sexual conquest, which is symptomatic of Ngugi's patriarchal perspective.

The Return plays out the crisis of potency which confronts the male colonized insurgent. The return to which the title refers is both a double return and a non-return. Kamau returns from resistance and incarceration to his village, family and friends to find that the landscape and his former acquaintances have changed under the Emergency conditions. The villagized settlement and the people carry the traces of Imperialist 'counter-insurgency' strategies, and this implies a return of Kamau's history under colonial forms of domination; which runs counter to his recent liberation from the concentration camps. Further, Kamau's return is a non-return, because he returns to nothing - the familiar ways of life and established human relations have been fragmented under the Emergency. Kamau's crisis obtains in a lack of recognition. His home environment is altered and his reappearance in it goes unacknowledged:

His spirits were damped as he feebly asked: 'Do you not remember me?' Again [the women] looked at him. They stared at him with cold, hard looks; like everything else, they seemed to be deliberately refusing to know or own him. It was Wanjiku who at last recognized him...He left them feeling embittered

and cheated. The old village had not even waited for him. And suddenly he felt a strong nostalgia for his old home, friends and surroundings. He thought of his father, mother and - and - he dared not think about her. But for all that, Muthoni, just as she had been in the old days, came back to his mind. (50-51)

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, Wanjiku's recognition of Kamau resonates with her own loss of a son in the Emergency. Secondly, Kamau's nostalgia is a desire for an originary plenitude and Muthoni is the most important sign of that plenitude. Thirdly, a proleptic reading of the passage points to the possibility that Muthoni (like the old village) has not waited for Kamau and that she is therefore subsumed into the rural landscape.

When the detainee's discuss their 'lost objects', it is evident that their identities as resisters or victims of colonialism - their constructions of self - are predicated on productions of a gendered other. The resumption of life after incarceration is equated with the resumption of procreation:

Another detainee put in: 'For me, I left my woman with a baby. She had just been delivered. We were all happy. But on the same day, I was arrested...' And so they went on. All of them longed for one day - the day of their return home. Then life would begin anew. (51)

For the detainees, 'their' women are the signs of an harmonious future, to which they ('them-selves') will return after their production as colonized subjectivities has ceased. The Return shares a number of thematic and ideological affinities with A Grain of Wheat; the most important of which is Ngugi's location of 'woman' as a transcendent entity outside of History. On the most straightforward level, Kamau's inability to identify with the changes brought about by the Mau Mau insurgency and the Security Force's counter-insurgency is co-extensive with his inability to re-identify with the gendered-other who might reconsolidate his identity - Muthoni. The only other transcendent sign in the narrative is that of the river ('Honia river still

flowed' (50)) and Muthoni is aligned with the river when Kamau drops his bundle into Honia. The loss of his spouse becomes 'water under the bridge' and, paradoxically, realigns female subjectivity with nature. Kamau's crisis is resolved in the narrative when linear history under colonization (his arrest, Muthoni's loss, his 'return') is replaced by a cyclical history (Honia as 'bring-back-to-life' implies the seasonal and the perennial). In turn, this cyclical history accords with the formation of human subjectivity under an Oedipal organization, in which the male subject's desire for the lost object (the mother) must repeatedly be invested elsewhere.

The encounter between Kamau and his captors depicts his crisis of potency in the face of the emasculating machinery of Imperial dominance:

He had suffered many humiliations, and he had not resisted. Was there any need? But his soul and all the vigour of his manhood had rebelled and bled with rage and bitterness.

One day these wazungu [white devils] would go!
One day his people would be free! Then, then - he did not know what he would do. However, he bitterly assured himself that no one would ever flout his manhood again. (52)

Ngugi's protagonist conforms with a phallic heroism. Ironically, this heroism relies upon a discourse of conquest in order to establish itself. In all of Ngugi's prose, conquest takes the form of the eradication of the white settler's presence in Kenya, the retrieval (winning back) of alienated land and the sexual domination of women.

The Martyr is perhaps the most ambivalent representation of Mau Mau in Ngugi's short fiction. The story exposes the inconsistencies and disparities in the settlers' constructions of the identities of Self and other. Mrs Hardy and Mrs Smiles are advocates of the Imperialist narrative:

When Mrs Smiles and Mrs Hardy came into her house two

days later to discuss the murder, they wore a look of sad triumph - sad because Europeans (not just Mr and Mrs Garstone) had been killed, and of triumph, because the essential depravity and ingratitude of the natives had been demonstrated beyond all doubt. (39)

The parenthesized qualification in this passage is important, because it emphasizes the racism which informs the characters' appraisal of the murder, and because it points to a lingering liberal-humanism in Ngugi himself. The Martyr is implicitly a critique of Mrs Hill's liberalism, but here the critique is contaminated by the ideology which Ngugi seeks to oppose. The cornerstone of liberal-humanism is that people may relate on equal terms because they share an underlying humanity, and in the process it ignores the material asymmetries which make some subjects 'more human' than others.

Mrs Hill is an apologist for the Imperialist narrative. Her construction of the (black) other is premised on 'tolerance' and co-option. She is complicit with Imperialism because she corresponds to its beneficent Janus-face:

She sighed over and over again as she remembered her pioneering days. She and her husband and others had tamed the wilderness of this country and had tamed the unoccupied land. People like Njoroge now lived contented without a single worry about tribal wars. They had a lot to thank the Europeans for. (46)

Mrs Hill's dialogue with colonial Kenya and the (unsexed) subaltern subject is founded on misprision. Njoroge's memories of his father and his family's claim to the land provide a counter-narrative to Mrs Hill's interested self-authorization. Equally, Njoroge is far from contented.

Further, even Mrs Hill's naturalization of her privilege is represented as an accident of language- after learning that the Garstones have been murdered, we are introduced to her:

No where was the matter more thoroughly discussed than in a lonely, remote house built on a hill, which

belonged, quite appropriately, to Mrs Hill. (39)

Njoroge's counter-narrative subverts the 'appropriateness' of his employer's ownership of the land. Significantly, his 'counter-memory' is also established upon fortuity:

It was a strange coincidence that he had come here. A big portion of the land now occupied by Mrs Hill was the land his father had shown him as belonging to the family...

'Do you see that fig tree? Remember that land is yours. Be patient. Watch these Europeans. They will go and then you can claim the land.'

...He knew it all - all by heart. He knew where every boundary went through. (43)

Njoroge's 'counter-memory' illustrates that the colonizer's propering of the land entails an inscription of the landscape (geo-graphy) which fragments the subaltern's relation to his (in this case) environment. Nevertheless, Njoroge's relation to the land is naturalized by a myth of origin and legation which, I have already argued, is imbricated in Gikuyu traditionalist phallogocentrism. As such, Njoroge's claim to proprietorship of the farm is not un-founded.

The Martyr contains another double inscription, which obtains in the dual significances attached to the sign 'boy'. It forms part of Mrs Hill's linguistic arsenal as a term which both domesticates and diminishes her male African employees (41-42). This usage is subjected to authorial irony when Njoroge is described as Mrs Hill's:

... 'houseboy'. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man nearing middle age. (41)

Njoroge, on the other hand, uses the word 'Boys' to denote the 'Freedom Boys' (*Ihii*), who are Mau Mau insurgents (44-46). The capital letter used here points towards Ngugi's valorization of this usage. The activities of Mau Mau in this story imply a form of political and socio-economic empowerment for colonized

subjects such as Njoroge. However, this empowerment is framed in socio-sexual terms. The term *ihii* signifies uncircumcized boys. Its occurrence in the story recuperates a Mau Mau symbology of revolution as a male rite of passage, and this symbology is constructed by silencing the voice of the subaltern woman.

The resolution of Njoroge's 'plot' to murder Mrs Hill is interesting, because the conclusion denies Njoroge the possibility of mastery. Rather, Njoroge's death enacts a symbolic castration. Yet, prior to the (accidental) shooting, Njoroge and Mrs Hill have separately reached a private *rapprochement* with each other, despite the marked differences in their ideological positions. The negated possibility of a negotiated middle-ground is what fuels the narrative's 'tragic' trajectory. This middle-ground warrants closer attention:

She thought of Njoroge. A queer boy. Had he many wives? Had he a large family? It was surprising even to her to find that she had lived with him for so long, yet had never thought of these things. This reflection shocked her a little. It was the first time she had ever thought of him as a man with a family. She had always seen him as her servant. Even now it seemed ridiculous to think of her houseboy as a father with a family...This was something to be righted in future. (47)

He knew that she had loved her husband. Of that he was sure. She almost died of grief when she had learnt of his death. In that moment her settlerism had been shorn off. In that naked moment, Njoroge had been able to pity her. Then the children! He had known them. He had seen them grow up like any other children. Almost like his own...And then he realized, too suddenly that he could not do it. He could not tell how, but Mrs Hill had suddenly crystallized into a woman, a wife, somebody like Njeri or Wambui, and above all, a mother. He could not kill a woman. He could not kill a mother. (45)

The terminology of the latter passage is suggestive: the 'naked' moment and the children who are almost like Njoroge's own perhaps hint at the colonized's latent desire for the female colonizer. What is more important is that Mrs Hill progressively becomes 'a

woman, a wife...and above all, a mother'. This sentence might be read as an allegory of the formation of female subjectivity under a uterine social organization. Spivak's contention that women are a 'biologically-oppressed caste' is apposite here. Quite clearly, despite Mrs Hill's position of ideological complicity with the dominant culture, her gendered physiology redeems her. Njoroge and Mrs Hill both succumb to the seductiveness of the family romance, and obfuscate the family's importance as a political institution which produces, and is produced in, ideologies of gender. In turn, Ngugi's patriarchal interest is made explicit here. The possibility of a negotiated intersubjectivity relies upon employer and employee, oppressor and oppressed, relating as gendered subjects. It is also disturbing that Njoroge is sacrificed to an ideal - that colonial subjects may ignore their interpellation into asymmetrical subject positions - dominant and dominated, paternalizing and inimical, privileged and abject - and find equality in their respective memberships of the human family. Here, Ngugi resurrects the liberal-humanist discourse which he has so carefully exposed.

Mrs Hill misprizes Njoroge's impulse to save her, and this misprision inheres in the colonial production of *Mau Mau* as the familiar devil ('So Njoroge had led them here! (47)'). Even after Njoroge has died, Mrs Hill's ideological position is far from consolidated:

Mrs Hill and Mrs Hardy were especially profuse in their congratulations.

'We told you they're all bad.'

'They are all bad,' agreed Mrs Hardy. Mrs Hill kept quiet. The circumstances of Njoroge's death worried her. The more she thought about it, the more of a puzzle it was to her. She gazed still into space. Then she let out a slow enigmatic sigh.

'I don't know,' she said.

'Don't know?' Mrs Hardy asked.

'Yes. That's it. Inscrutable.' Mrs Smiles was triumphant. (47-48)

Mrs Hill's inability to make sense of the incident translates as an inability to perpetuate the narrative of settler identity

which contributes to the broader narrative of Imperialism. Her final position is unstable because it admits of an outside, an 'unknown' elsewhere. Mrs Smiles' comment indicates that she is now engaged in a dialogue of misprision with Mrs Hill, and further, that *Mau Mau* as familiar devil is easily reappropriated into the dialectic of Self and other which orders colonial subjectivity.

Finally, Ngugi's representations of *Mau Mau* in Secret Lives are transgressive, inasmuch as they frame *Mau Mau* as an unhomely presence in the colonizer's consciousness. Nevertheless, Ngugi constructs the insurgents according to an androcentric historical narrative, thus neglecting the Kenyan women who formed the backbone of the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army.

Endnotes

Chapter 1

1. Where I use the term 'ideology', I will be following Althusser's formulation:

Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. (1993: 36)

'Discourse' will be understood according to Elizabeth Wright's definition, in which she follows Michel Foucault. Discourse is:

...a set of linguistic practices which generate social and cultural activity, governed by rules that are unformulated and characteristically unrecognized by the speakers concerned. Thus rules of exclusion operate which keep out unqualified persons in fields such as law and medicine, and define what is considered irrelevant and unmentionable. (1991: 160)

2. Betsy Wing's glossary in The Newly Born Woman states that, while *jouissance* has been received to mean 'total sexual ecstasy' in the English language, its implications are more far-reaching in a French linguistic context:

[It] would be inadequate to translate it as enjoyment. This word, however, does maintain some of the sense of access and participation in connection with rights and property.

Constitutions guarantee the 'enjoyment of rights'; courts rule on who is to enjoy which right and what property. It is, therefore, a word with *simultaneously* sexual, political and economic overtones. Total access, total participation and total ecstasy are implied. (Cixous, 1986: 165, Wing's emphasis)

It should be pointed out that Cixous' use of *jouissance* relies upon Roland Barthes' developments of the term in The Pleasure of the Text. Barthes posits that the reader is confronted by two possible relations to a text - those of pleasure or bliss (Richard Miller translates *jouissance* as 'bliss'). These two relations are not necessarily discontinuous. Barthes bases his claims on developments in psychoanalytic theory (that subjectivity is constituted in language and desire is mediated through language) and discourse theory (that language is comprised of competing discourses and is therefore not a unified entity). It is precisely these divisions in the subject and in language which enable the reading subject to find bliss beyond/between the languages of the text:

The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas - for my body does not have the

same ideas I do. (1975: 17)

Bliss is unspeakable, inter-dicted. (1975: 21)

Read against passages such as these, Cixous' notions of 'writing the body', 'coming to writing' and 'writing (in) the between' have antecedents in Barthes' reception of psychoanalytic theory. Her use of the term *jouissance*, therefore, is primarily an enabling strategy which attempts to theorize increased access for women to the male-dominated Symbolic - an access which is disruptive of the logic of gender binarism encoded in language itself.

3. Hélène Cixous' theorization of the dialectical structure of desire that orders Self and other is partially based upon Lacan's work. Lacan posits that a human child comes to have a sense of its own selfhood once it has been denied access to its mother's body as sole object of its desire, after which it acquires language. The child is constituted as a subject in and by language. Prior to this development it inhabits 'the Imaginary', and does not differentiate between itself and others. Once it is denied access to the dyadically structured Imaginary, it experiences the loss or lack which provides it with a sense of selfhood and which signals its entry into the realm of human culture, dominated by the (metaphorical rather than biological) father who has denied the child access to the Imaginary. Lacan designates the realm of language 'the Symbolic order' (after Levi-Strauss).

The phallus, which represents the Law of the Father, comes to signify what it is that the child lacks - a return to the mother's body. The child's desire to be what the mother desires (ie. to return to the Imaginary) is repressed. This desire is inevitably predicated upon lack; it can never find its full satisfaction, since to do so would require a complete disintegration of the ego. Hence, we continually invest our desire in objects. Toril Moi elaborates:

Lacan's famous statement 'The unconscious is structured like a language' contains an important insight into the nature of desire: for Lacan, desire behaves in precisely the same way as language: it moves ceaselessly from object to object or from signifier to signifier, and will never find full or present satisfaction just as meaning can never be seized as full presence.... There can be no final satisfaction of our desire since there is no final signifier or object that can be that which has been lost forever (the imaginary harmony with the mother and the world). (1985: 101)

Cixous' problematizing of the Symbolic - via the disruptive category of *jouissance* - is tantamount to a challenge to the model which assigns the female body to the place of lack; the place where the subject (and female subjectivity) is not.

Chapter 2

1. Ngugi describes Njoroge's motives in becoming scholarly:

As [Njoroge] could not find companionship with Jacobo's children (except Mwihaki), for these belonged to the middle class that was rising and beginning to be conscious of itself as such, he turned to reading. (48-49)

I find confirmation of Ikkideh's assertion in this passage.

2. A resonance of this transgression may be detected in Njoroge's speculations when Howland's daughter, a missionary, comes to the school:

Njoroge had not seen many Europeans at very close quarters. He was now quite overawed by the whiteness and tenderness of this woman's skin. He wondered, What would I feel if I touched her skin? (46)

Njoroge's emphasis is upon his own sensations in relation to the woman and, to this extent, his characterization at this point in the novel's development is imbricated in the discourse of conquest which orders the barber's narrative.

3. Jacobo, Juliana and Lucia all have latinate names, which would ally them with the Italian prisoners, inasmuch as both groupings are situated between the English colonizer and the African peasantry.

4. In *Embodying Africa: woman and romance in colonial fiction*, David Bunn examines colonial discourse and landscape in two novels by Henry Rider Haggard. He investigates what he terms 'the obsessively reiterated metonymic association of woman's body and the African landscape' (1988: 1). Bunn's analysis of the map of 'Kukuanaland' in King Solomon's Mines is similar to my own reading of Weep Not, Child:

Maps are, in a way, like laws, but the map of Kukuanaland displays a...form of libidinal investment. In it, the foreign landscape appears as an uncharted "virgin" zone that awaits to be inscribed by masculine colonizing zeal. (1988: 1)

Bunn's reading of the novel reveals the conflation of sexual conquest with political conquest in Rider Haggard's text:

It was Solomon...who came in search of Sheba's wealth, but found instead her sexuality. In other words, the quest for Sheba's treasure is a gesture of mastery both over women and over indigenous cultures, yet it is vulnerable because of desire. There is, then, a correspondence established between sexual and political potency. (1988: 14)

While my analysis of Ngugi's novel has much in common with this reading of Rider Haggard's novel, Bunn touches upon an assumption which is more central to my reading of Ngugi's fiction:

...Haggard's texts produce fictive landscapes ideologically, but they do so under the shadow of contradiction and neurosis. The figure of Woman in the colonial text seems to me the point at which most of these contradictions become visible, and it is also at this point that other voices, voices outside the dominant ideology, are raised against the background static of the text.

Further, Bunn mentions that 'the equation between woman's sexuality and Africa is used as a point of reference for the male subject' in the narrative.

One might ask why Ngugi's anti-colonial fiction shares the literary tropes adopted by Rider Haggard, a colonial writer. I would suggest that the answer lies in Ngugi's subject-formation under colonial education in Kenya. It is possible that the residues of colonial fiction in his novels reflect a presiding unease in relation to his literary precursors. Ngugi acknowledges that Rider Haggard is one of these precursors (Sicherman, 1990: 21).

5. MacDonnel comments:

Formed as a means of domination and resistance, ideologies are never simply free to set their own terms, but are marked by what they are opposing.
(1987: 34)

Both christology and education are contested discourses in Weep Not, Child, although christology is far more ambiguously treated than education. Both discourses would appear to lack potency against the colonial hegemony: Isaka's death is pathetic because he does not resist the soldiers at all (101). Further, christology is an ideology which ensures the subjection of the colonized, particularly when its emphasis on asceticism and meekness is utilized to persuade its converts to find satisfaction in poverty and political apathy. Education functions as an ideology of subjection in that the exercise of power and of discipline are central to its methodology (see the beating, 14). Further, education is shown to operate according to a hierarchy of knowledge (and therefore of power), which the teacher possesses and the pupil does not (44-46). Ngugi's own ideological position at the time of writing provides for an interesting interrogation. Not only was he highly educated by Kenyan standards (see Sicherman, 1990: 4-6), but he had been a Christian for at least three years:

1955-1959...Ngugi wins place at Alliance High School...and becomes "rather too serious a Christian"... (Sicherman, 1990: 4)

In 1967 Ngugi said that in writing *The River Between* he was "deeply Christian"... (Maughan Brown, 1991: 173)

This might suggest that, at this very early point in his career, Ngugi was questioning the political and social efficacy of both Christianity and education.

6. The land serves simultaneously to unite and divide colonizer and colonized: it encloses them in a dialectic. Ngotho owns his land by proxy. Likewise, Howlands is able to relate spiritually to the land by proxy. In their relationship, Self and other are terms which are mutually definitive. Equally, when Howlands arrests Njeri (80), he dispossesses Ngotho of one of his wives. This again points to the association between the subaltern woman and the land. Killam quotes Jomo Kenyatta's Facing Mount Kenya:

Communion with the ancestral spirits is perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried. The Gikuyu consider the earth as the 'mother' of the tribe, for the reason that the mother bears her burden for about eight or nine moons while the child is in her womb, and then for a short period of suckling. But it is the soil that feeds the child for a lifetime; and again after death it is the soil that nurses the spirit of the dead for eternity. Thus, the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it. Among the Gikuyu the soil is especially honoured, and an everlasting oath is to swear by the earth. (1980: 38)

This may provide an understanding of the rationale behind the equation of the subaltern woman with the land in Weep Not, Child. Further, Ngotho practises custodianship over the *shamba*, because he owes it to 'the dead, the living and the unborn of his line' (31).

7. The term 'autography' is my own. I use it to indicate an attempt by the author-effect to guarantee its presence within a text. This attempt is, in my analysis, always ideologically overdetermined. Autography functions, then, as a form of signature (the autograph), which ostensibly guarantees the author-effect's presence and intention in the narrative as the final source of meaning. Rather than employing the term 'auto-bio-graphy', which might offer a sentimental reading of the 'lived' or 'historical' experience of Ngugi, I use the term 'autography' to problematize such claims.

8. Cixous postulates that a male subject-formation under patriarchy must inevitably place importance on the phallus as its totem:

And one becomes aware that the Empire of the Selfsame is erected from a fear that...is typically masculine: fear of expropriation, of separation, of losing the attribute. In other words, the fear of castration has

an impact. Thus, there is a relationship between the problematic of the not-selfsame, not-mine (hence of desire and the urgency of reappropriation) and the constitution of a *subjectivity that experiences itself only when it makes its law, its strength, and its mastery felt*, and it can all be understood on the basis of masculinity because this subjectivity is structured around a loss. (1986: 80, emphasis added)

One might be inclined to question how the fear of castration is relevant to the armed struggle in Kenya. The novel provides a clue. Ngotho is the character onto whom castration is projected, and this castration would appear to result from the fact that he has not, at any point in the narrative, engaged the colonizing powers on an equal footing. Even when he does finally meet Howlands (in the latter's capacity as D.O.) face to face, his gesture is one of submission: he hands himself in, in order to confess. This structural dynamic suggests that, in the Gikuyu male subject's dealings with colonial authority, submission is considered to be tantamount to relinquishing one's status as 'a man'. Equally, armed resistance provides a means of making one's law, strength and mastery felt, and therefore validates the subject's masculism.

9. There is another association on which Njoroge draws in this passage. It is one which originates in Christian ideology. Jacob (Jacobo in the novel) is clothed in wool by his mother so that he might deceive his blind father (Isaac) into believing that Jacob is his hirsute brother Esau. MacDonnel states:

[Words] change their meanings from one discourse to another, and conflicting discourses develop even where there is a common language. (1987: 45)

Incidentally, if one looks at the opposition between Jacobo/Isaka, as figures representative of political groupings in Kenya, it is obvious that Isaka (the revivalist) occupies the more privileged position in the narrative, since his name is an African corruption of a biblical name, whereas 'Jacobo' (the landowning bourgeois) is a foreign (latinate) corruption.

10. 'Intention: desire, authority - examine them and one is led right back...to the father. It is even possible not to notice that there is no place for woman in the calculations.' (Cixous, 1986: 64)

11. Howland's wife is also a dissenting voice in relation to his patriarchal authority (77) and he does not heed her interjections either. It is interesting that the three men - Howlands, Jacobo and Ngotho - hold dialogue with one another at various narrative junctures, while their wives do not hold dialogue amongst themselves (or with the other men) once. This evidences Ngugi's gender-political agenda of situating women outside of history and of denying them a sisterhood which originates from the similar forms of subjection under which they live (despite class and racial differences).

12. Sympathetic readings of the novel have claimed that Ngotho cuts a tragic figure at this point in the narrative (see, for example, Killam: 1980). However, a symptomatic reading enables one to become aware of patriarchal discourse in operation, as it manifests itself in signal textual inconsistencies. For example, this quotation implies that both of Ngotho's wives are present and that he is 'even' unable to look them in the face, but Njeri is not present because she has already been arrested. In seeking to emphasize the extreme indignity of Ngotho's position (that of the fallen patriarch), Ngugi draws attention to his patriarchal affiliations by overplaying his hand.

13. See, for example, the first paragraph of the novel.

Chapter 3

1. Although I am aware that 'circumcision' is a dangerous term to employ in the description of an amputation that differs substantially from the operation performed on men, I have retained the term in places. In my opinion, 'clitoridectomy' might be a far more disabling term in an analysis of this kind, since it might confine a feminist discourse to the specifically corporeal effects of the operation. I therefore use 'clitoridectomy' to denote the physical operation, and I reserve 'circumcision' to imply the cultural effects attendant upon the rite. The latter term's etymology provides my analysis with a productive vantage point from which to view the rite. The implication of a *cutting around* is consistent with my contention that the operation sculpts the body into its acculturated form, after which the body may be swathed with significances. Further, the Gikuyu male subject's construction is imbricated (albeit in a less disempowered position) in the cultural effects of the operation performed upon his body.

2. Not astonishingly, Waiyaki reaches a similar conclusion (Ngugi, 1989: 141-142).

3. This chapter is indebted to Elizabeth Cowie's *Woman as Sign*, which I introduced in my first chapter. Cowie contends that the sign 'woman' is socially constructed in terms of the relationships in which women are positioned by exogamy. On one level, the Gikuyu patriarchy's intervention in the circumcision debate had the upshot of regulating the exchange of women. The KCA claimed, in a letter to the press, that the missionaries' attempts to outlaw clitoridectomy were motivated by a desire to secure uncircumcized girls as wives (see Arnold, 1974: 121).

4. Glenn lists a fifth feature which does not inform my analysis.

5. Levin notes that one activist (Awa Thiam) has gone so far as to suggest radical lesbianism for gender-oppressed African women (1986: 220).

Chapter 4

1. Edgerton embellishes upon this version:

Another explanation came from a Mau Mau military leader known as General China, who reported that the name originated when the Kenya police interrogated a Maasai who had recently taken the oath. The man reportedly said that he had taken part in "Mumau," mispronouncing *muma*, the Kikuyu word for oath. The police report misspelled it "Maumau." (1989: 59)

Edgerton's chapter contains an ironic (intentional?) misspelling. The title is: "Something Called Maw Maw".

2. Price's representations of Mau Mau are most likely informed by those of Dr Louis Leakey, an anthropologist with colonial sympathies. In an introduction to Mau Mau and the Kikuyu, Leakey writes:

Mau Mau is openly anti-White and anti-Christian. It aims to drive the Europeans and all other foreigners out of the country and intends to use murder, intimidation, and, finally, a general uprising to bring this about. (1952: ix)

In Lion Adventure, from the same children's fiction series as African Adventure, Price's protagonists, Hal and Roger, drift over Africa in a balloon and land in the Serengeti. They call Joy Adamson's lions out by name and are guarded by the animals as they sleep. They then discover Dr. Leakey ('a very real person'; footnote, 1976: 170) working alone in an unpeopled landscape. Safe at last from the wilderness (and the savages lurking invisibly in the landscape?) the two teenagers return to their father by plane.

3. I use the term rapable in accordance with Higgins' and Silver's formulation in their introduction to Rape and Representation:

[Rape] and rapability are central to the very construction of gender identity and [our] subjectivity and sense of ourselves as sexual beings are inextricably enmeshed in representations. Viewed from this angle, rape exists as a context independent of its occurrence as discrete event. (1991: 3)

In my use of the term rapability, I am aware that it is, in rape cultures, one of the fundamental predicates of 'womanhood'. Nevertheless, as Teresa de Lauretis (quoting Monique Plaza) explains, rape also places men in a feminized position:

It is *social sexing* which is latent in rape. If men rape women, it is precisely because they are women in a social sense...and when a male is raped, he too is raped "as a woman" (*The Violence of Rhetoric* in

Armstrong and Tennenhouse, 1989: 244; quoting Plaza, 1980: 31)

The rape of Gikuyu women by 'Security Forces' during the Kenyan insurgency is documented by Edgerton (1989: 113, 168).

Chapter 5

1. Mugo's private and public confessions are similar to those made by Razumov, in Conrad's Under Western Eyes, to Natalia and to the revolutionaries (1923 (1911): 297, 307)

2. For the term 'gynaeceum', I am indebted to an interview with Michel Tournier, in which he says:

Initiation cannot have the same meaning for [girls] as it does for boys. Brought up by women, like their brothers, they obviously do not have to break with that milieu and become integrated into another group, like boys. Normally, they are destined to remain within the gynaeceum. (1992: 219)

My reading of the 'House of Mumbi' is that it retains women within one social position (that of childbearers or future mothers) whether the girl resides with her mother, or the wife with her husband.

3. For a collection of short stories which approaches a literary representation of the Kenyan subaltern woman, see Likimani, 1985. Likimani nowhere attempts an investigation of the activities of Mau Mau prostitutes during the Kenyan emergency, but her collection points to some of the complexities of the subaltern woman's political/gender positions and her multiple forms of resistance during the insurgency.

Chapter 6

1. For a very perceptive reading of the inconsistencies in characterization in the representation of this incident, see Crehan, 1986: 11.

2. Nding'uri speaks while aboard a raft made of banana stems, which is occupied by black male revolutionaries of various nationalities. Cixous' critique of the Selfsame's return to the category of the same is perhaps applicable here:

The Winner: the one who was saved, the homecoming man!
Always returning to himself - in spite of the most
fantastic detours. (1986: 74)

Nding'uri's raft of banana stems may possibly encode

circumcision. The significance of the banana plant in the Gikuyu custom of clitoridectomy is suggested by one of the circumcision songs performed by Njuguna:

I saw cunt holding tobacco wrapped in banana leaves
 ...I didn't know that cunt
 You took so much snuff. (208)

If Nding'uri's raft does encode circumcision, then it produces the Gikuyu mother as clitoridectomized subject inside the gynaeceum. I am reading according to Spivak's assertion that 'the text (of male discourse) gains its coherence by coupling woman with man in a loaded equation and cutting the clitoris out' (1983: 191).

3. Ngugi's short story, *Minutes of Glory*, hints at the class-transgressive potential of prostitutes. The protagonist, Beatrice, steals money from a truck-driver client in order to adorn herself fashionably and entice offers from male patrons of the bar, if only for a while. The story's gender-political import consists in Beatrice's motives: to masquerade temporarily as a desirable and unattainable gender-subject. Beatrice thus poignantly dramatizes her commodification and objectification as a barmaid. Wanjia's 'minutes of glory' occur during sex with Karega (234).

4. Ngugi alludes to the song in Devil on the Cross (20), but recuperates it for a masculinist historical narrative.

5. My reading here is consonant with Spivak's suggestions for the itinerary of the deconstructive feminist critic:

As a literary critic she might fabricate strategic "misreadings," rather than perpetrating variations on "received" or "receivable" readings, especially upon a woman's text. She might, by the superimposition of a suitable allegory, draw out a reading of the text that relates it to the historico-social differential of the body. This move should, of course, be made [scrupulously] explicit. Since deconstruction puts the ideology of correct readings into question, our friend is content with this thought. (1983: 186)

By mooting Chui (leopard), rather than Kimathi, as the fictional father of Wanjia's child, the historico-social differential of Kimathi's body is available to a re-rereading. Rather than traditionalist/nationalist productions of Kimathi as an icon of potency in resistance, Kimathi's leopard-skin clothing (see Edgerton, 1989: plate facing 147) might function as a metonym for the contribution of Nairobi prostitutes to the Mau Mau insurgency, even though this metonym would not reduce their political investment in the insurgency to the replacement of a colonial 'father'/ruler by a Gikuyu patriarch code-named Kimongonye (or Kamoongonye in Ngugi's term).

6. Barbara Johnson's essay, *The Framework of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida* (in Young, 1987: 225-243), focuses on the *parergon*, or frame, of both Lacan's and Derrida's readings of Poe's short story, *The Purloined Letter*. Derrida's critique of Lacan is that he omits the frame of Poe's story (the frame of literariness as undecidability) by reconstructing the univocality of a psychoanalytic reading, which returns to itself by finding itself in the story. Johnson's critique of Derrida is that he places a deconstructive frame on Lacan's reading, and that he thus commits the same error as that of which he accuses Lacan. The *parergon* in Derrida's work is not 'a simple inside/outside dichotomy' (Young, 1987: 226, editorial summation) because it constitutes an inside by excluding an outside and a beyond. Young comments:

The frame is one of the 'brisures' ('hinge-words') whose paradoxical logic deconstructive analysis explores. Framing must always occur in both its senses - pictor[i]al and criminal. (*ibid.*)

In Jackson's reading, I find an omission of the rôle of gender-constructs in establishing the phallogocentrism of Ngugi's historical narratives. Equally, I read the copulative metaphor of 'a fruitful future', in(to) Jackson's terminology, as a reference to those constructs.

7. Catachresis is defined by J. Hillis Miller as:

...the violent, forced, or abusive use of a term from another realm to name something which has no "proper" name. The relationship of meaning among [such instances] of terminology is not from sign to thing but a displacement from one sign to another sign which in turn draws its meaning from another figurative sign, in a constant *mise en abyme*. The name for this displacement is allegory. (1976: 72)

My reading of Wanja's pregnancy is allegorical, inasmuch as it shuttles between simulacra which share a referent (*chui/ngari*) and between signifiers which institute a play of meanings (mother of men/mistress/madam).

Chapter 7

1. The 'ogres' names in Devil on the Cross suggest either a voracious potential or a visceral construction of consumption. The names are:

Gitutu wa Gataanguru ('the hated - or incorrigible, detested, inhuman - tapeworm', Sicherman, 1990: 201)

Mwireri wa Mukiraai ('one who rears himself...[and who] silences other people'; Sicherman, 1990: 223)

Nditika wa Nguunji ('a giant or shapeless person...who folds [or]

strangles'; Sicherman, 1990: 225)

Fathog Marura wa Kimeengemeenge ('the first word...refers to a plant used to make sleeping mats or the ceiling of a thatched roof; the second word refers to something huge, shapeless or ugly'; Sicherman 1990: 213)

Kimeendeeri wa Kanyuanjii ('he who crushes or grinds...the juice out of someone'; Sicherman, 1990: 209)

Kihaahu wa Gatheeca's name suggests gluttony. Sicherman glosses it as:

a bully or neurotic ("Kihaahu") and a glutton ("Gatheeca," which literally means "one who stabs"). One translation might therefore be "schizophrenic eater". (1990: 209)

This locates him within narrative constructions of the visceral, despite his thin body.

Ngugi's equation of fiscal/pecuniary consumption with alimentary/visceral consumption - and the metaphors of excretion or expulsion which construct the neocolonial acolytes and the women who throw their newborn children into latrines - is perhaps amenable to a psychoanalytic reading, which would take its premise from Freud's contention that the infant's faeces is the first product alienated from the subject:

[One] of the most important manifestations of the transformed erotism derived from this source [anal erotism] is to be found in the treatment of money, for in the course of life this precious material attracts on to itself the psychical interest which was originally proper to faeces, the product of the anal zone. We are accustomed to trace back interest in money, in so far as it is of a libidinal and not of a rational character, to excretory pleasure, and we expect normal people to keep their relations with money entirely free of libidinal influences and regulate them according to the demands of reality. (1955 (1918): 72)

I have not opted for such a reading in this chapter because I believe that it would be indefinitely complicated by the slippage which is implicit in Freud's (Eurocentric) notions of 'normal people' and 'the demands of reality', and by psychoanalysis' problematic constructions of the 'feminine' subject. Such a reading might indirectly mediate between the British Imperial patriarchy (which based its constructions of Mau Mau on psychoanalytic 'precepts') and the Gikuyu patriarchy (which produces 'woman' according to a model of lack). This mediation would permit male political antagonists to collude at the level of a privileged male physiology.

2. Boehmer argues along similar lines:

Ngugi stands with many others when he attacks the colossus of white Western maledom, yet hesitates to dislodge the ramparts of its patriarchy. Simply expressed, the problem would rather seem to be an identification of national freedom with male freedom and an inherited state structure. Thus a patriarchal order survives intact. (1991: 195)

One of the ways in which Ngugi does keep the colonial or the Imperial patriarchies intact is by representing Mau Mau as primarily a sexually-potent insurgency, which, in my reading, recuperates the colonial discourses of potency and inadequacy which produced Mau Mau. Of course, these discourses led directly to the subjection of Kenyan women during the Emergency; these women were indentured to produce the limit between a safe, domesticated, feminized, villagized space and the bestial, atavistic, unhomely (uncanny/unheimlich) space of Mau Mau. In short, when Ngugi avoids confrontation with the Gikuyu and colonial patriarchies, the gesture naturalizes the privilege of the Gikuyu male subject.

However, I do not entirely agree with Boehmer's article, on the grounds that she does not directly tackle the Gikuyu patriarchy's production of the subaltern female subject and Ngugi's affiliation with that production. These omissions on Boehmer's part are manifest when one considers her claim that the gun bestowed upon Wariinga is 'the quintessential emblem of phallic power' or that women in his texts 'are not to be left out of the military-preparedness program' (1991:195). Boehmer's comments imply that 'woman' is a subject who does not go to war: an implication which is not borne out by the activities of subaltern women who engaged in active combat during the Mau Mau insurgency. The masculism which produces the gun as a symbol of phallic power consists in the fact that it is made by the hands of the (male) workers - Muturi's name denotes 'smith' - and that Wariinga derives 'strength' from the possession of the gun.

3. Elleke Boehmer seems to make a similar point when she writes:

Instead of preparing the way towards liberation by dismantling those structures that marginalise and oppress women, [Ngugi] disguises the rigid distinctions that such structures enforce when his women come dressed as men. Instead of questioning processes of objectification, he places a male weapon in the hands of his women characters and sets them on pedestals as glorified revolutionaries, inspiring symbols for a male struggle. Male values thus come encased in female shape, just as...guns come disguised in loaves of bread. (1991: 195)

In Njamba Nene's Pistol, the second of Ngugi's children's stories, Njamba Nene's mother, Mother Wacu, is the fetishized woman. Njamba Nene steals a loaf of bread during the Emergency, because he, like the rest of the population, is hungry. He returns the bread because he decides that he is no hungrier than

anyone else. A man congratulates him on his honesty and asks him to take the bread to General Ruheni, a Mau Mau leader, in the forest. On the way, Njamba Nene hollows the bread out to eat some of it, and he discovers a pistol in the middle of the bread. He is waylaid by the security forces, who are screening for Mau Mau insurgents. Njamba Nene holds the Security Forces up with the pistol and the Mau Mau insurgents amongst the crowd of suspects (including the man, who is General Ruheni) tie them up and shoot a collaborator. What I find interesting is that Njamba Nene continually questions his own motives and actions by wondering what Mother Wacu would say if she knew he had stolen bread (7) and was harbouring a pistol (14). Equally, when he has been waylaid by the counter-insurgency forces, he asks, "What am I dying for, Mother Wacu?" (16) and his alibi for carrying the bread is that his mother has asked him to buy it (21). Further, Njamba Nene substantiates his political convictions with proverbs told to him by Mother Wacu (9, 23, 33). When he delivers the pistol to General Ruheni, the General tells him:

"...A gun in the hand of a freedom fighter is the bread of life. Now you know that each of the rules laid down by the Kenya Land and Freedom Fighters has a very good reason behind it..." (31)

The gender framing of this children's story produces Mother Wacu as embodying the significances which contribute to Mau Mau as Law. As such, Mother Wacu is the bearer of History's significance: she is the fetishized woman.

4. Incidentally, Wariinga continues by saying:

There, scattered on the sandy floor, lie the fragments of her illusions...How did the boys put it in their Muthuu dance-song?

An amazing sight,
The clay pot is now broken!
When I came from Nairobi,
I never knew that
I would give birth to
A child named
'Producer of wondrous courage'.

'...Today we can only be called the bearers of doomed children instead of the bearers of children of heroic stature. (136-137)

The Muthuu dance-song which Wariinga quotes is performed by Gikuyu boys prior to circumcision, and it became popular in the forties, when Gikuyu soldiers returned from service in World War 2 and walked along the River Road in Nairobi, relating their exploits. It was performed by Mau Mau insurgents in the forests, and it praised Kenyatta considerably (cf. Sicherman, 1990: 222 and Barnett and Njama, 1966: 175). Significantly, 'Mumbi' (Moombi) is glossed by Kenyatta as: 'Moulder, potter, creator; name of the first Gikuyu woman. The mother of the Gikuyu nation'

(1968: 324). In addition, the Muthuu song invokes the traditional Gikuyu saying, 'Moombi arugaga na ngeo' - the potter cooks with broken pots (*idem.*). Kenyatta explains the saying in this way:

In the pottery industry all the work, from start to finish, is done by women...Men are debarred by custom from approaching the moulding-place, especially when the work is in progress...Should some of the pots break, as they usually do, during the burning time, the women always suspect that some ill-behaved man has crept to the spot during the night and has spoiled their work. To avoid this suspicion men keep away from this sacred ground until the work is finished...Very few potters have good pots for themselves; they sell all the good ones to others, leaving themselves with the bad ones...This shows that the Gikuyu have developed a system of trading far beyond working merely to satisfy family needs. (1968: 87-88)

In the context of Wariinga's allusions, the Muthuu dance-song encodes the sexual division of labour in traditional Gikuyu society (upheld by the myth of Mumbi), the circumcision ritual, and the male potency of erstwhile Gikuyu resistance movements.

5. I am working within Spivak's formulations in *Displacement and the Discourse of Woman*. Gayatri Spivak works around the following formulation: 'the discourse of man is in the metaphor of woman' (1983: 169). Further, she delineates some of the key facets of Derrida's work in order to submit deconstruction to a feminist critique:

The desire to make one's progeny represent his presence is akin to the desire to make one's words represent the full meaning of one's intention. Hermeneutic, legal or patrilinear, it is the prerogative of the phallus to declare itself the sovereign source. Its causes are also its effects: a social structure - centred on due process and the law (logocentrism); a structure of argument centred on the sovereignty of the engendering self and the determinacy of meaning (phallogocentrism); a structure of the text centred on the phallus as the determining moment (phallogocentrism) or signifier. (1990: 169-170)

Spivak's reading of Derrida is applicable to Devil on the Cross, but since we are dealing with an African text - rather than with French philosophy - I have shifted the framework of her reference.

6. Florence Stratton comments:

From [Ngugi's] class perspective, 'a strong determined woman' is to all intents and purposes a man. The identification of his heroine with masculine values is Ngugi's response to the question of how to create a female national subject...[Rather] than

rewriting nationalism, he rewrites woman. (1994: 163)

Stratton's chapter on Devil on the Cross argues along very similar lines to my own analysis of the novel. I would not, however, agree that '[peasants] and workers...are portrayed as being sexually egalitarian' (1994: 62). Rather, I find a propering mechanism at work in the fact that Wariinga's co-workers exchange 'good-humoured' 'remarks and jokes, including some which touch on the subject of men and women' and the narrator's assertion that this joking is based 'on mutual respect' because Wariinga 'belongs to them all' (222).

7. On the epistemology of translation in Matigari, see Gikandi, 1991.

8. I use the lower-case ('english') to denote my use of a colonial and hybrid English, in accordance with Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffith's assertion that the lower-case functions 'as a sign of the subversion of the claims to status and privilege to which English usage clings' (1989: 217n). I use the lower-case 'gikuyu' to denote a traditional or indigenous language differentiated - or even fragmented - by colonial discursive violence.

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